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William Blake in the 1960s: Counterculture and Radical Reception

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PhD Thesis

University of Sussex

June 2014

Statement

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been, and will not be, submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Signature

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'William Blake in the 1960s: Counterculture and Radical Reception'

Summary

The study begins with an account of Blake, as voiced by Allen Ginsberg, taking part in a key Sixties anti-war protest, and goes on to examine some theoretical aspects of Blake's relationship with the Sixties. In Chapter One, I explore the relationship between 'popular Blake', 'academic Blake', and 'countercultural Blake'. The chapter seeks to provide a revisionist account of the relationship between Blake's Sixties popularity and his earlier reception, suggesting that all three elements of Blake's Sixties reception – popular, academic and countercultural – have long been intertwined, and continue to interact in the Sixties themselves.

In Chapters Two and Three, I focus in detail on Allen Ginsberg as a central figure not only in Blake's countercultural popularization, but also in the creation of Sixties counterculture itself. The first of these chapters, 'Visionary Blake, Physical Blake, Psychedelic Blake', looks in detail at Ginsberg's 1948 'Blake vision' and the way Ginsberg later uses it to construct a Blakean narrative for the Sixties. I examine the significant differences between the versions of this event presented in Ginsberg's early poems and in his later prose and interview accounts, and Ginsberg's consequent attempts to develop a general theory of poetry in which the specific effects of Blake's poetry on the consciousness are compared to those of psychedelic drugs. Finally, I suggest that there are analogies between this 'psychedelic' approach to Blake and the interest that Aldous Huxley had in using psychedelics to access Blake's own visionary state of consciousness.

Chapter Three, 'Ginsberg's Blakean Albion', analyses a selection of Ginsberg's poems, all linked to Blake's myth of Albion. I use these poems to examine the tensions present within the three-way relationship between Blake, Ginsberg and British counterculture. Particular attention is given to Ginsberg's poem 'Wales Visitation' (1967), a work which I suggest is founded on the joint Romantic inheritance of Blake and Wordsworth, and which demonstrates the ways in which various strands of British Romanticism interact both within Ginsberg's poetry and within the broader Sixties counterculture.

The final chapter of the study examines various aspects of the relationship between Blake and Bob Dylan, demonstrating the extent of Blake's influence on Dylan, but also tackling the surprisingly complicated and problematic question of the route(s) by which Blake arrives in Dylan's work.

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I am grateful to the University of Sussex for selecting my project to receive AHRC funding, without which it would have been impossible for me to complete the PhD.

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Note on referencing of major primary sources

Blake

Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from William Blake's works are taken from *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman, rev. edn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). As is conventional in Blake scholarship, this work is referenced within the text as 'E' followed by a page number. Where appropriate, this is preceded by an abbreviated book title, plate number and line number. I have not provided references for quotations from the widely available and well known poems in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, however such quotations are also from Erdman's *Complete Poetry and Prose*.

The following abbreviations are used for Blake's books:

J *Jerusalem The Emanation of The Giant Albion*

M *Milton a Poem*

MHH *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

VDA *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*

Ginsberg

Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Allen Ginsberg's poetry are taken from Allen Ginsberg, *Collected Poems: 1947-1997* (New York: HarperCollins, 2006). Dates given for Ginsberg's poems are dates of composition, not of first publication.

Dylan

Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Bob Dylan's songs are taken from Bob Dylan, *Lyrics: 1962-2001* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

Introduction: William Blake in the 1960s

Prologue: Blake at the 1968 Democratic Convention protests

On Sunday 25 August 1968, thousands of anti-Vietnam war demonstrators were gathered in Chicago, ready to oppose the nomination of a pro-war presidential candidate at the Democratic National Convention. By the middle of the week the area was engulfed in violence, and tear gas was drifting into the convention centre, as police broke up the 'Festival of Life' and attacked protesters, journalists and bystanders. The dramatic media images of this 'police riot' meant that the events of that week became key moments in the history of the Sixties.

The atmosphere on the Sunday afternoon was already tense, with police surrounding the park where proto-punk band the MC5 were performing a free concert. After their set, the microphone was passed to a familiar bearded figure, who sat cross-legged on the stage with an Indian harmonium and began singing William Blake's poem 'The Grey Monk' to a tune he had recently composed himself.¹

'The Grey Monk' seemed an appropriate choice in the circumstances; the story of a tortured pacifist monk, the poem asserts the power of non-violent resistance in the face of war and tyranny. Moreover, it is likely that Blake wrote the poem around the time that he was himself charged with sedition, following an ill-tempered exchange of words with a soldier outside his house.² Like the protesters in Chicago in 1968, Blake in 1803 found himself oppressed by the security apparatus of his own country, which seemed to be under the sway of Urizen, the supremely conservative being of Blake's mythopoetic system. Furthermore, Britain in 1803, like America in 1968, was engaged in a long-running and strongly ideological foreign war,³ and throughout the Romantic

¹ Details of the events in Chicago are drawn from Michael Schumacher, *Dharma Lion: A Biography of Allen Ginsberg* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1992), pp. 507-517.

² On the dating of 'The Grey Monk', see G. E. Bentley, *Blake Books: Annotated Catalogues of William Blake's Writings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 342. On Blake's arrest and trial, see G. E. Bentley, *The Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 248-266.

³ Britain had been continuously at war with Revolutionary France between 1793 and 1802; Blake's arrest in 1803 coincided with the war's resumption after a brief hiatus, hence the soldiers stationed on the Sussex coast where he was then living.

period the British government also faced protest and civil unrest at home, similar to that which characterized the Sixties period in America and elsewhere.⁴

Whether or not Blake wrote the poem as a direct response to his own arrest and trial (and there is good evidence that he did),⁵ ‘The Grey Monk’ clearly reflects the politics of the period in which it was written; its overall anti-war message, encapsulated in the seventh stanza, seems clear:

But vain the Sword & vain the Bow
They never can work Wars overthrow
The Hermits Prayer & the Widows tear
Alone can free the World from fear[.]
(E489)

At the same time however, it is notable that the poem operates not so much as a revolutionary rallying call, but more as a warning to those who seek to overthrow their war-mongering leaders. The final couplet of the poem bleakly reveals how he who ‘crushd the Tyrants head / [...] became a Tyrant in his stead’; this is seemingly a reference to the descent of the French Revolution into ‘the Terror’ and the subsequent rise of Napoleon, but can also be read as a cautionary tale for would-be revolutionaries throughout history, including those in Chicago in 1968.⁶

The singer who introduced Blake’s cautionary lines of 1803 to the protests of 1968 was of course Allen Ginsberg, the Blake-inspired Beat poet, political activist, and icon of Sixties counterculture. During some of the many lectures he gave on Blake’s poetry in the 1970s, Ginsberg showed his own knowledge of the original historical context of ‘The Grey Monk’, explaining the poem’s relationship to the politics of the 1790s and 1800s in Britain and France, and Blake’s place in the circle of political and social radicals that also included Mary Wollstonecraft, William Godwin and Tom Paine. Ginsberg also told the well-known (although possibly apocryphal) story of how Blake

⁴ On the culture of radical politics and protest in the Romantic period, see Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

⁵ See David V. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire: A Poet’s Interpretation of the History of His Own Times*, 3rd edn (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 414-5.

⁶ The final lines of ‘The Grey Monk’ seem to be an example of the ‘Orc cycle’, the idea – first put forward in Northrop Frye’s *Fearful Symmetry* (1947) – that Blake’s myth involves a repeated pattern whereby the spirit of revolution (typically represented by Orc) eventually takes on the tyrannical attributes of Urizen which it seeks to overthrow. Clearly however, there are also genuinely revolutionary energies celebrated in works such as ‘The Grey Monk’. For an interesting revisionist reading of Frye’s ‘Orc cycle’, see Christopher Z. Hobson, ‘The Myth of Blake’s “Orc Cycle”’, in *Blake, Politics, and History*, ed. by Jacki DiSalvo, G. A. Rosso, and Christopher Z. Hobson (New York and London: Garland, 1998), pp. 5-36.

helped Paine flee to France after the publication of *Rights of Man* in 1792, or as Ginsberg explained to his students, in comic vernacular, ‘the fuzz was after Paine and Blake warned Paine to get out of London just before the local cops arrived’.⁷ Typically however, Ginsberg also extended his analysis of the poem to the historical context of the Sixties, suggesting for example that the friendship between William Blake and Tom Paine was akin to that between Yippie activists Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman, both of whom had been organizers of the Chicago ‘Festival of Life’, along with Ginsberg himself.

As one of the most iconic figures within Sixties counterculture, Ginsberg would have been instantly recognizable to everyone present at the protests, as well as to those who learnt of the events in Chicago via the world’s media. It seems likely that most of those at the protests were previously unfamiliar with ‘The Grey Monk’, however in the chapters that follow I intend to show that they would have been aware that its author William Blake had gained the status of presiding spirit of Sixties counterculture, a status he had achieved in no small part due to Ginsberg’s continuous proselytizing on his behalf.

While I examine the Blakean influence on texts by several different figures who occupied important positions within Sixties counterculture, I have placed Allen Ginsberg at the centre of the study. I will argue that he played a unique and essential role not only in the dissemination, popularization and appropriation of Blake’s poetry within the Sixties, but also more fundamentally in the creation of a counterculture that was Blakean. It is therefore unsurprising to find William Blake amongst the protesters in Chicago in 1968, and to find him given voice by Allen Ginsberg.

A year after the Chicago protests, Ginsberg reprised his performance of ‘The Grey Monk’ in the courtroom where he was a defence witness at the trial of the ‘Chicago Seven’ activists, accused of conspiring to organize the riots in Chicago. Despite the somewhat farcical efforts of both the prosecutor and the judge to stop him, Ginsberg again performed Blake’s poem in full, along with sections of his own best-known poem ‘Howl’, as part of his efforts to convince the jury that the ‘Festival of Life’

⁷ Allen Ginsberg, ‘War and Peace Class: Kent State, April 6, 1971’, in *Allen Verbatim: Lectures on Poetry, Politics, Consciousness*, ed. by Gordon Ball (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), pp. 195-211 (p. 195). See also ‘Spontaneous Poetics - 124 (William Blake and the French Revolution)’, transcribed at *The Allen Ginsberg Project* website <<http://ginsbergblog.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/spontaneous-poetics-124-william-blake.html>> [accessed 21 May 2014].

organizers were committed to non-violence.⁸ He explained that his intention in performing 'The Grey Monk' at the protests had been to create 'a feeling of ease and relaxation to eliminate tension, to eliminate anxiety, to eliminate hysteria, to eliminate the hallucination of scary images of police', and indeed, as we have seen, the poem itself seems to caution against violence.⁹ The chaotic trial and convictions (eventually overturned) of Sixties radicals including Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin became, like the riots themselves, a media spectacle that gripped America; once again, Ginsberg played a central role, and so too did Blake.

It is typical of Blake's role in the Sixties that he should play a part in events which seemed to be primarily political in character – an anti-war demonstration at a political convention and the subsequent trial of the organizers – but which Ginsberg and others wanted to insist were equally spiritual in nature. This argument is the focus of much of Ginsberg's trial testimony, during which he agreed that an appropriate title for his role in the protests would be 'the religious experimenter of the Yippie Organization', and explained how his performance of Blake's 'The Grey Monk' had led on to a marathon seven-hour session of mantra chanting, which he and other protesters continued even as police used violence to clear the park.¹⁰

This syncretic mixing of Blake and Eastern religion was particularly typical of Ginsberg, who had been told on a visit to India five years earlier to 'take Blake as your guru',¹¹ but it was also representative of the Sixties countercultural approach to Blake more generally. I will return to this point later, but I would like to briefly suggest here that far from diluting the power of Blake, such an approach is itself Blakean. As Edward J. Ahearn points out in a somewhat different context, 'Blake anticipates the syncretism of later writers in combining elements from Eastern religions, Scandinavian myth, conceptions of Druidic practice, and much else.'¹²

Ginsberg's trial testimony suggests that the purpose of his chanting, of both Blake's poem and the Indian mantras, was practical, political and spiritual; it was aimed

⁸ See 'Chicago Seven Trial Testimony,' in Allen Ginsberg, *Spontaneous Mind: Selected Interviews 1958-1996*, ed. David Carter (London: Penguin, 2001), pp. 200-242, and also Jason Epstein, 'The Chicago Conspiracy Trial: Allen Ginsberg on the Stand', *The New York Review of Books*, 12 February 1970 <<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1970/feb/12/the-chicago-conspiracy-trial-allen-ginsberg-on-the/>> [accessed 20 May 2014].

⁹ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 236.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Barry Miles, *Ginsberg: A Biography* (London: Viking, 1989), p. 314.

¹² Edward J. Ahearn, *Visionary Fictions: Apocalyptic Writing from Blake to the Modern Age* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 14.

at calming the situation, creating a sense of common political purpose, and catalyzing spiritual awareness.¹³ I want to suggest that the combination seen here of the spiritual and political sides of the Sixties, which we might broadly categorize as the Hippie or ‘countercultural’ side and the New Left or ‘radical’ side, reflects a similar combination of qualities which are found in Blake’s own poetry.¹⁴ I will explore further the Sixties relationship between these sets of Blakean contraries in Chapter One, making an additional link to the different schools of Blake scholarship – historicist and ‘systematist’ – that emerged during this period.

Blake’s presence can also be discovered in the short public statement that Ginsberg issued after the Chicago protests, which was significantly entitled ‘All Is Poetry’. In this statement, Ginsberg claims that ‘Authorities of the city are authors of loud-mouth bad poetry’, with ‘tear gas substituted for the vital breath.’¹⁵ He further contrasts this ‘loud-mouth bad poetry’ of police violence with idyllic representations of ‘hippies chanting Aum the first word of the universe under cloudy newmoon light and brilliant sun [...] a hundred youthful voices under the trees, [...] wandering among crowds of children at night’.¹⁶ Although the piece does not explicitly mention Blake, or Ginsberg’s own Chicago performance of ‘The Grey Monk’, Ginsberg seems to be drawing here on the language and imagery of *Songs of Innocence*, particularly ‘The Echoing Green’ and ‘Nurse’s Song’, both of which he would also later set to music. In the illuminated *Songs*, both of these Blake poems are accompanied by visual depictions of children and youths playing under trees, while ‘Nurse’s Song’ also tells how as dusk falls, ‘the voices of children are heard on the green’ (see Figure 1 below); these images are reflected in Ginsberg’s ‘youthful voices under the trees’ and ‘crowds of children at night’.

¹³ *Spontaneous Mind*, pp. 222-227. It is also significant that Ginsberg later claimed that he experienced a ‘visionary experience’ during this chanting that was comparable not only to his experiences with drugs but also to his original ‘Blake vision’ of 1948, discussed in detail in Chapter Two. See Paul Portugés, *The Visionary Poetics of Allen Ginsberg* (Santa Barbara: Ross-Erikson, 1978), p. 68.

¹⁴ The terms ‘radical’ and ‘countercultural’ are usefully differentiated by Marianne DeKoven in her important study of the Sixties, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 3. However, while I argue later in this chapter that these two sides of the Sixties are both in different ways Blakean, I also employ the term ‘counterculture’ more broadly, recognizing that it has both a spiritual and political element.

¹⁵ Allen Ginsberg, ‘All Is Poetry: Statement on 1968 Democratic National Convention’, in *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays 1952-1995*, ed. by Bill Morgan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), p. 50.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*



Figure 1. 'Nurse's Song', from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, Copy A. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Ginsberg knew that Blake himself had sung many of his poems, and his performance of 'The Grey Monk' in Chicago also represented the beginning of an ongoing project of setting Blake's poetry to music. The project drew inspiration from Ginsberg's friendship with Bob Dylan (which I explore in Chapter Four), and also from the 1965 recordings of Blake's 'Ah, Sunflower' and 'How Sweet I Roamed' by the

band The Fugs.¹⁷ However, in setting Blake's poems, Ginsberg also claimed the more direct influence of Blake's own voice; in 1948 he had experienced an 'auditory hallucination' of Blake reciting his poetry, an event which continued to have a profound influence on Ginsberg in the decades that followed. As I will argue in Chapter Two, this 'Blake vision' not only represented the foundation of Ginsberg's lifelong relationship with Blake, and of his own career as a poet, but can also be seen to mark the point of origin of the Sixties themselves.

Immediately after he returned from Chicago, Ginsberg began recording his settings of Blake's poems (see Figure 2 below), a selection of which were released on the album *Songs of Innocence and Experience by William Blake, tuned by Allen Ginsberg* (MGM, 1970).¹⁸ He explained that this attempt 'to vocalize the wisest language sounds ... from Blake' had begun 'with a vision, a much earlier vision' (the 'Blake vision' of 1948), but now continued with 'a realization of the ashes of the body of American democracy in Chicago.'¹⁹ Once again therefore, Ginsberg places his musical settings of Blake – and his relationship with Blake more generally – in twin contexts, which are visionary and political. However, his Blake songs, both as recorded and as performed at poetry readings and further political protests,²⁰ can also be seen as quite deliberate attempts to disseminate Blake's work beyond the realms of literary culture and into the popular culture of the Sixties.

¹⁷ See Allen Ginsberg, '1978 Stony Brook class', transcribed at *The Allen Ginsberg Project* website <<http://ginsbergblog.blogspot.co.uk/2012/08/allen-1978-in-stoneybrook-poetry-and.html>> [accessed 20 May 2014].

¹⁸ This album is no longer available, but many of the songs are included in Ginsberg's 4-CD collection *Holy Soul Jelly Roll: Poems And Songs 1949-1993* (Rhino, 1994). The complete Blake album can also be heard at the University of Pennsylvania's PennSound website <<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Ginsberg-Blake.php>> [accessed 28 May 2014].

¹⁹ See 'Partisan Review Interview with Alison Colbert (1971)', in *Spontaneous Mind*, pp. 259-272 (p. 261) (ellipsis in original).

²⁰ See for example Barry Miles's description, in *Ginsberg: A Biography* (London: Viking, 1989), of a 1972 protest outside the White House where Ginsberg 'found himself onstage, singing Blake, as tear gas swirled about him yet again' (p. 448).

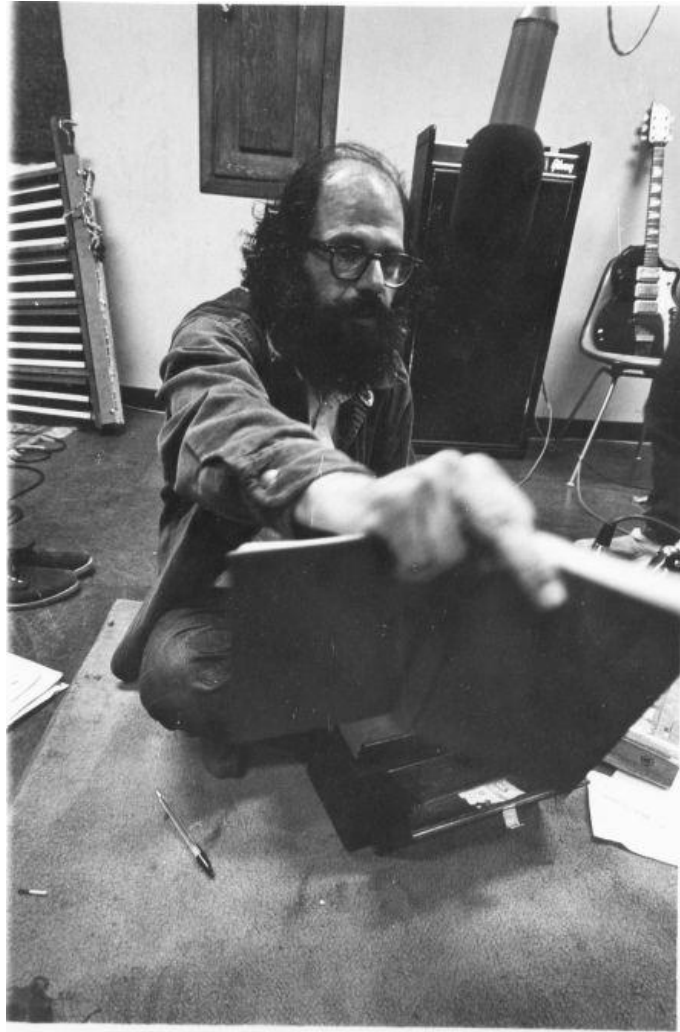


Figure 2. Ginsberg recording Blake songs, Apostolic Studios, New York City, June 1969. Courtesy of the Ginsberg Collection.

William Blake in the 1960s: Chapters

In Chapter One, 'Popular Blake, Academic Blake, Countercultural Blake', I take a broad look at various strands of Sixties interest in Blake, which can variously be categorized as popular, academic, and countercultural. More especially, I seek to show how these versions of Sixties Blake are sometimes in tension with each other, but can also be seen to merge with or to complement each other. Furthermore, the broad issue of the relationship between Blake's Sixties popularity and what is perceived to be his obscurity or neglect in previous periods, is one which concerns both counterculture and academia. I suggest that while the Sixties was a unique and important period in Blake's reception, all these versions of Sixties Blake, and the links between them, need to be understood with reference to Blake's earlier reception history, from his own lifetime onwards.

In Chapters Two and Three, I focus in detail on Allen Ginsberg as a central figure not only in Blake's countercultural popularization, but also in the creation of Sixties counterculture itself. The first of these chapters, 'Visionary Blake, Physical Blake, Psychedelic Blake', looks at Ginsberg's 1948 'Blake vision' and the way Ginsberg later uses it to construct a Blakean narrative for the Sixties. I examine the significant differences between the versions of this event presented in Ginsberg's early poems and in his later prose and interview accounts, and Ginsberg's consequent attempts to develop a general theory of poetry in which the specific effects of Blake's poetry on the consciousness are compared to those of psychedelic drugs. Finally, I suggest that there are analogies between this 'psychedelic' approach to Blake and the interest that Aldous Huxley had in using psychedelics to access Blake's own visionary state of consciousness.

Chapter Three, 'Ginsberg's Blakean Albion', analyses a selection of Ginsberg's poems, all composed during various visits to Britain and all linked to the myth of Albion as developed in Blake's later prophetic books. I use these poems as a means by which to examine the tensions which I see as present within the three-way relationship between Blake, Ginsberg and British counterculture. Particular attention is given to Ginsberg's poem 'Wales Visitation' (1967), a work which I suggest is founded on the joint Romantic inheritance of Blake and Wordsworth, and which demonstrates the ways in which various strands of British Romanticism interact both within Ginsberg's poetry and within the broader Sixties counterculture.

The final chapter of the study examines various aspects of the relationship between Blake and Bob Dylan, demonstrating the extent of Blake's influence on Dylan, but also tackling the question of the route(s) by which Blake arrives in Dylan's work and Dylan's attitude towards Blake's presence.

Blake and the Sixties: A Circular Relationship

In this final section of the introduction, I want to draw attention to a key theoretical proposition which informs the rest of the study. This is the idea that an examination of Blake's influence on the Sixties should involve not only a recognition that the Sixties counterculture influenced ongoing interest in and interpretation of Blake, but also an acknowledgement that Blake's fundamental identity or meaning was influenced or even constituted by the counterculture.

In effect, I want to suggest that Blake and Sixties counterculture are involved in a two-way relationship. Thus not only is Ginsberg able to construe his 1948 'Blake vision' as the beginning of a Blakean 'New Age' which encompasses both the Beat culture of the Fifties and the broader counterculture of the Sixties (as I will explain more fully in Chapter Two), but from that date onwards the meaning of Blake's work, or we might even say the meaning of the figure of Blake himself, becomes influenced by the Beats and their successors.²¹

There are a number of ways to refine or make sense of this proposition. One work of Blake scholarship which has had an important influence on my thinking (and which I discuss in more detail in Chapter One) is Mike Goode's 2006 article 'Blakespotting'. Goode suggests not only that the meaning of Blake's texts might 'depend entirely on how, when, where, to what end, and by whom they are read', but also that Blake himself might have been particularly attracted to the apparently authorless form of the proverb precisely because of its ability to travel far, gathering ever-increasing numbers of contexts while retaining some characteristically Blakean aspect; thus 'a text's historically specific meanings in one context sometimes reveal its potential energies in other times and places'.²² Goode's argument can be productively combined with an observation made by Matthew J. A. Green, who points out that not only Blake's poetry but also much of the other writing produced during the Romantic period characteristically 'orientates itself toward the future, addressing subsequent generations or anticipating a coming age', and that often such 'claims upon futurity [...] have come to be justified, though rarely in the manner anticipated by their authors.'²³ Although Green does not use this as one of his examples, the relationship between Blake's well-known line 'Rouse up O Young Men of the New Age!' (E95), and the subsequent Blakean 'New Age' of the Sixties seems instructive of what Green has in mind here.

²¹ For a fascinating example of the way Blake's identity has become linked to both Sixties counterculture and American history more broadly, see Jim Jarmusch's 'acid Western', *Dead Man* (1995). The film features not only multiple quotations from Blake's poetry, but also an (entirely fictional) central character named 'William Blake' and other characters named after Blake's own characters. Despite the film apparently being set some decades after the death of (the historical) Blake, and being produced three decades after the 1960s, it clearly functions as a commentary on both the 'Sixties Blake' and the 'Blakean Sixties'. The fullest analysis of the links between the film and Blake's poetry is Troy Thomas, 'William Blake and *Dead Man*', *Adaptation*, 5 (2011), 57-87 (Thomas very briefly considers the film's links with Blake's Sixties reception on pages 84-86).

²² Mike Goode, 'Blakespotting', *PMLA* 121 (2006), 769-786 (pp. 770, 771).

²³ Matthew J. A. Green, 'The Impact of Romanticism on Subsequent Constructions of Self', *Romanticism* 15 (2009), 16-17 (p. 16).

One scholar from outside the world of Blake scholarship whose work I have also found useful in this context is Carrie Noland. In her article ‘Rimbaud and Patti Smith: Style as Social Deviance’, Noland considers the complex ‘relations of influence’ between Rimbaud and punk music, and attempts to address the question of not only *how* one might study an earlier canonical writer’s work via their later popular reception, but also *why* one might be motivated to do so. Her approach is clearly relevant to Blake’s Sixties countercultural reception (which often overlapped with Rimbaud’s own reception in the period), although Noland herself does not mention Blake.²⁴

The circular relationship between past and present that I am proposing is also addressed by Edward Larrissy in his introduction to the edited volume *Romanticism and Postmodernism*, where he draws attention to what he calls Blake’s ‘multiple temporality’:

From the point of view of the study of reception Blake is a late nineteenth-century and twentieth-century poet, important to the understanding of Swinburne, Yeats and Joyce, Ginsberg and Ted Hughes. In fact, if only in these precise senses, Blake is not a poet of the Romantic period.²⁵

Larrissy’s more general summary of these issues is also clearly applicable to the circular relationship between Blake and the Sixties that I am proposing: ‘The questions of what influence the past may have on us, and how that influence may operate, must be closely bound up with the question of how we decide what the past is, and whether the interpreter’s view is altering the evidence.’²⁶ Although Larrissy does not mention it, the very formulation of his question reflects the language of Blake’s own conclusion that the evidence is always altered by the interpreter’s view, since ‘the Eye altering alters all’ (‘The Mental Traveller’, E484).

This aphorism, a favourite of Ginsberg’s, also reflects the two-way nature of the relationship between Ginsberg and Blake. However, this relationship of mutual influence across the centuries is also typologically prefigured in Blake’s relationship to his own primary influence, John Milton. Thus Alicia Ostriker notes, drawing on the same aphorism, that ‘as Milton undergoes a metamorphosis when we see him through

²⁴ Carrie Jaurès Noland, ‘Rimbaud and Patti Smith: Style as Social Deviance’, *Critical Inquiry*, 21 (1995), 581-610. Also reprinted in a revised form in Noland’s *Poetry at Stake: Lyric Aesthetics and the Challenge of Technology* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

²⁵ Edward Larrissy, ‘Introduction’, in *Romanticism and Postmodernism*, ed. by Edward Larrissy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 1-12 (p. 10).

²⁶ Larrissy, *Romanticism and Postmodernism*, p. 1.

Blake's eyes, so Blake alters in the perspective of Ginsberg's discipleship.²⁷ To put it another way, I want to suggest that Blake wrote the Sixties, just as the Sixties (re)wrote Blake.

²⁷ Alicia Ostriker, 'Blake, Ginsberg, Madness, and the Prophet as Shaman', in *William Blake and the Moderns*, ed. by Robert J. Bertholf and Annette S. Levitt (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982), pp. 111-131 (p. 113).

Chapter One:

Popular Blake, Academic Blake, Countercultural Blake

Some scholarly encounters with Blakean counterculture

A precedent for the critical exploration of Blake's modern reception, including some aspects of his Sixties countercultural presence, was set in 1982 by the publication of the edited collection *William Blake and the Moderns*, but it is only in the last decade or so that a more extensive critical corpus has grown around this topic.¹ However, this growing body of literature relevant to my own topic mostly still consists of individual chapters or articles focussed narrowly on the influence of Blake on one or sometimes two Sixties authors. Only a few articles (and no book-length studies) have attempted to consider the reasons for, or dynamics of, Blake's broader countercultural popularity in the Sixties. Indeed the only article that explicitly sets out to do so is Jeffrey Kripal's 'Reality Against Society: William Blake, Antinomianism, and the American Counterculture' (2006), which provides a brief overview of Blake's influence on Allen Ginsberg, Aldous Huxley and Theodore Roszak, but also frames this in the context of a more general theory for why Blake should have found such a welcoming reception within Sixties counterculture.² Kripal bases his argument on two interesting suggestions. The first of these is that the term 'countercultural' is essentially equivalent to the theological-political term 'antinomian' ('against the law') which has often been applied to Blake, and secondly that reading Blake helped Ginsberg, Huxley and others to see that 'reality itself is countercultural'.³ However, the short length of his piece means that he is unable to explore these ideas much further.⁴

¹ *William Blake and the Moderns*, ed. by Robert J. Bertholf and Annette S. Levitt (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982). I will refer to many of the more recent works on this topic in the course of the study.

² Jeffrey J. Kripal, 'Reality Against Society: William Blake, Antinomianism, and the American Counterculture,' *Common Knowledge* 13 (2006), 98-112.

³ Kripal, p. 103.

⁴ One problem with Kripal's work is his uncritical reliance on the term 'antinomian' itself. Kripal admits that he is basing his ideas on E. P. Thompson's definition of the term in *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), but seems unaware that the central thesis of Thompson's book, in which Blake's antinomianism is explained with reference to his supposed Muggletonian spiritual background, has now been conclusively disproved (see Keri Davies and Marsha Keith Schuchard, 'Recovering the Lost Moravian History of William Blake's Family', *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, 38 [2004], 36-43.) This gap in Kripal's knowledge is odd given that he seems familiar with some more recent work by Marsha Keith Schuchard, one of the scholars originally responsible for disproving Thompson's theory in 2004. For a more detailed indication of why these new discoveries about the spiritual background of Blake's family make the term 'antinomian' profoundly problematic, see Keri Davies and David Worrall, 'Inconvenient Truths: Re-historicizing the

Another approach to this topic is taken by Henry Remak in his 1984 article 'European Romanticism and Contemporary American Counterculture'.⁵ As the title suggests, his thesis is more broadly based than Kripal's, focusing not specifically on Blake but rather on the general cultural links between Romanticism and Sixties counterculture, which he suggests encompass a series of shared attitudes towards sexuality, communal living, drugs, environmentalism, folklore, spirituality and so on. The significance of Remak's article lies not only in his emphasis on the similar historical and cultural conditions of the two periods, but also in his argument that the counterculture represents a movement of historical continuity as much as it does revolution. Remak argues that the Sixties did not involve a sudden rediscovery of the countercultural aspects of Romanticism, but rather that there is an unbroken countercultural tradition to be found, which stretches from the 1790s to the 1960s.⁶

While there are limitations to the broad-brush approaches taken by Kripal and Remak, particularly the limited amount of textual analysis possible in these short pieces, the boldness of Kripal's attempt to theorize the relationship between Blake and Sixties counterculture is admirable, and Remak's linking of the Sixties to earlier countercultures, including those in between Romanticism and the Sixties, is an approach that I follow to some extent in this chapter.

Both Remak and Kripal approach this subject from the perspective of their non-Romanticist scholarly backgrounds, but I also want to make reference here to one other recent article which does come from within the world of Blake scholarship and which attempts to offer something of an overview of the links between Blake and the Sixties, in combination with a more textually focused approach. This is Peter Otto's 2012 article "'Rouze up O Young Men of the New Age!': William Blake, Theodore Roszak, and the Counter Culture of the 1960s-1970s".⁷

Politics of Dissent and Antinomianism', in *Re-envisioning Blake*, ed. by Mark Crosby, Troy Patenaude and Angus Whitehead (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 30-47.

⁵ See Henry H. H. Remak, 'European Romanticism and Contemporary American Counterculture,' in *Romanticism and Culture: A Tribute to Morse Peckham and Bibliography of his Work*, ed. by H. W. Matalene (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1984), pp. 71-95.

⁶ Another study that emphasizes the historical continuity of 'the Youth Revolution' is Anthony Esler's charming if rather dated *Bombs, Beards and Barricades: 150 Years of Youth in Revolt* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971), in which he breezily runs through the analogies between the counterculture of the 1960s and a whole series of earlier revolutionary movements.

⁷ Peter Otto, "'Rouze up O Young Men of the New Age!': William Blake, Theodore Roszak, and the Counter Culture of the 1960s-1970s", in *Blake 2.0: William Blake in Twentieth-Century Art, Music and Culture*, ed. by Steve Clark, Tristanne Connolly, and Jason Whittaker (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 27-40.

In common with Kripal and Remak, Otto emphasizes what he calls the ‘remarkable parallels between the counter culture and Romanticism, and between the historical environments in which they emerged’, and makes the broad suggestion that this is the reason why ‘Blake found readers willing to take his work as a crucial cultural resource’ in the Sixties.⁸ However, his analysis of the Blakean Sixties is also structured around a close reading of the work of the cultural critic Theodore Roszak, a writer whose work is about the counterculture, while also being very much a part of it.

Otto’s focus on Roszak as representative of the Blakean counterculture is appropriate, since it was Roszak who first popularized the term ‘counterculture’ itself, in *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (1969). This work was hugely influential as one of the first serious attempts to define, critique and celebrate the new consciousness of the 1960s; it is also full of references to Blake, beginning with an epigraph taken from Blake’s ‘Preface’ to *Milton* – ‘Rouse up, O Young Men of the New Age!’ – and ending with bibliographical notes which encourage the reader to become better acquainted with the work of Blake: ‘Anything Blake ever wrote seems supremely relevant to the search for alternative realities.’⁹

Although this is not a point that Otto himself makes in his article, I want to note here that Blake’s omnipresence within what is (in two different senses) an era-defining book is a sign of the fact that Blake already had a well-established place in Sixties alternative society before the term ‘counterculture’ entered general discourse towards the end of the 1960s.¹⁰ Thus just as Roszak prefaces his book with Blake’s ‘rousing’ call to the inhabitants of the ‘New Age’, thereby defining the Sixties ‘New Age’ as Blakean, he also implicitly relies on Blake as he attempts to define the meaning of the term ‘counterculture’ itself. Indeed, reaching beyond the argument of Otto himself, I want to suggest that Roszak’s book might in some respects be considered as a work of

⁸ Otto, p. 33.

⁹ Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (1969; repr. London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 302. In the epigraph, Roszak regularizes Blake’s original punctuation, and spelling of ‘Rouze’.

¹⁰ Otto repeats the common claim that Roszak not only popularized but also coined the term ‘counterculture’ (Otto, p. 28). I am not aware that Roszak himself ever made such a claim, and it is noteworthy that *Counter Culture*, edited by Joseph Berke (London: Peter Owen, 1969) was published the same year as *The Making of a Counter Culture*. (Both books also include some material that was first published the previous year.) Oddly, given the high profile of both books, the Oxford English Dictionary entry for ‘counterculture’ (which also acknowledges the two-word and hyphenated variants of the term), uses as its earliest example an obscure later reference from 1970 (see <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/42745>) [accessed 4 May 2014]). Whatever the origins of the term, Roszak (and through him Blake) was intimately involved in its early promotion and definition.

Sixties Blake scholarship, seeking to define counterculture and Blake in relation to each other.

Another canonical work of the counterculture which could be said to share this status is R. D. Laing's *The Divided Self* (1960). In *The Divided Self*, Laing's first book, he repeatedly draws on Blake to explain 'the self-body split' of schizophrenia, as in the following passage:

The best description of any such condition I have been able to find in literature is in the Prophetic Books of William Blake. [...] The figures of his Books undergo division in themselves. These books require prolonged study, not to elucidate Blake's psychopathology, but in order to learn from him what, somehow, he knew about in a most intimate fashion, while remaining sane.¹¹

Here it is noteworthy that there are two aspects to Laing's interest in Blake; firstly, he is interested in the complex mythology of Blake's prophetic books, inhabited by beings such as Albion, Urizen and Los, who with their 'emanations', 'shadows' and 'spectres' are indeed 'divided selves' as Laing's title suggests. However, as we might expect from a psychiatrist, Laing is also interested in the issue of Blake's own sanity or madness, which he seeks to link to Blake's portrayal of these 'divided selves'. Finally, he also wants to use Blake as a means by which to de-pathologize madness itself. While *The Divided Self* was written while Laing was still involved in more mainstream psychiatric practice, and its publication predated by seven years the coining of the term 'anti-psychiatry' by which his overall philosophy came to be defined, *The Divided Self* was a key text of the Sixties, achieving wide paperback distribution and a large readership, and ensuring that during the 1960s Laing was 'the most famous psychiatrist in the world'.¹²

Discussing the Sixties significance of Laing's 1967 work *The Politics of Experience* (a book with fewer Blake references but a characteristically Blakean title), Marianne DeKoven notes that Laing's work 'is characteristic of a crucial Sixties genre, which includes works, mostly philosophical but also psychoanalytic and/or largely unclassifiable', all of which locate 'hope for change – which must be revolutionary

¹¹ R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness* (1960; repr. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), p. 162.

¹² Allan Beveridge, *Portrait of the Psychiatrist as a Young Man: The Early Writing and Work of R. D. Laing, 1927-1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. xiii.

change to count at all – in individual consciousness’.¹³ DeKoven suggests that other authors who inhabit this genre include Norman O. Brown (whose works also make repeated reference to Blake),¹⁴ Carlos Castaneda, Erich Fromm, Paul Goodman, A. S. Neill, Wilhelm Reich, and Alan Watts. I want to suggest that we could also add Roszak’s *The Making of a Counter Culture* to this list, as well as Huxley’s Blake-influenced *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (1956), works which I briefly examine in the next chapter.

As DeKoven notes, Laing’s books are thus ‘representative of a substantial body of similar texts – widely read by radical countercultures, and influential in sixties ideologies, affects, and cultural-political practices’, but which can also be defined by the fact that they ‘have now largely fallen off the intellectual, cultural map.’¹⁵

While DeKoven herself makes only a single reference to Blake, linking him to the broad Sixties interest in childhood and alternative education,¹⁶ I want to suggest that the recurring presence of Blake within the particular genre of Sixties non-fiction literature that she defines above is significant for two reasons. Most obviously, Blake’s presence in the work of Laing, Brown, Roszak and others can be seen as a general marker of his centrality to the Sixties counterculture itself; however, I also want to draw attention to the way in which DeKoven defines such literature by the fact that it cuts across genres. Such works are ‘mostly philosophical but also psychoanalytic and/or largely unclassifiable’. As I argue here, they also straddle the three-way divide between popular, academic, and countercultural, the same categories which I will suggest we might use to divide (but also recombine and reconfigure) the elements of Sixties Blake.

I also suggested that the work of Roszak and Laing might further be included within the more specific genre of Blake scholarship itself, and I want to point out that one Sixties work of Blake scholarship, *Critics on Blake* (1970), does exactly that, including the section from Laing’s *The Divided Self* quoted above in an anthology of Blake criticism which also features the most ‘canonical’ Blake scholars and

¹³ Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 200.

¹⁴ See particularly Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death: The Psychoanalytical Meaning of History* (1959; repr. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985), in which Blake appears throughout.

¹⁵ DeKoven, p. 18. As DeKoven points out, Laing’s philosophy of anti-psychiatry and general worldview has strong similarities with those of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, figures whose fame has increased as Laing’s has decreased. DeKoven suggests that Laing and Foucault find themselves on different sides of the Sixties fault line between modernity and postmodernity that she delineates in her book.

¹⁶ DeKoven, p. 204.

commentators of the nineteenth and twentieth century, from Coleridge, Gilchrist, Rossetti and Yeats to Damon, Schorer and Erdman.¹⁷

While the rationale for the inclusion of Laing within this canonical group remains unexplained in the anthology itself, I will shortly attempt to turn the tables, and suggest that the lives and work of all the Blake scholars mentioned above means that they themselves can be seen to embody aspects of the 'countercultural Blake'. First however, I want to show that the open-minded merging of 'countercultural' and 'academic' approaches to Blake in the *Critics on Blake* anthology is the exception rather than the rule, at least within the Blake scholarship of the Sixties era.¹⁸

One significant but still largely unexplored aspect of Blake's Sixties countercultural reception is the fact that at the same time that – through the work of figures such as Huxley, Laing and especially Ginsberg – Blake was entering, forming, and thus himself being framed by the counterculture, he was also finally gaining a secure foothold in the literary canon of mainstream academia. As the Blake scholar G. E. Bentley noted in a 1977 overview of 'Blake's Reputation and Interpreters', Blake had been carried to this high water mark in the canon by a 'post-Second-World-War tidal wave of publication'.¹⁹ Nearly four decades after Bentley's observation, the tides of academic publication may ebb and flow a little, but Blake's place in the canon is unquestioned, and the ongoing significance of the original post-war 'tidal wave' of Blakean scholarship is still obvious. It included the works which are now seen as forming the foundations of modern Blake scholarship, from Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* (1947) to David Erdman's *Blake, Prophet Against Empire* (1954) and S. Foster Damon's *A Blake Dictionary* (1965). Also borne in on the same wave were definitive versions of Blake's works themselves; these were presented in typescript but (for the first time) with their original spelling and punctuation in Erdman's *Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (1965), and in their 'illuminated' and non-typeset

¹⁷ *Critics on Blake: Readings in Literary Criticism*, ed. by Judith O'Neill (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970), p. 93.

¹⁸ According to his biographer, Laing planned at one time to write a study wholly devoted to Blake (see Beveridge, p. 160). While as I have already shown, more recently there has been some scholarly interest in other aspects of Blake's Sixties countercultural reception, it is notable that no one has yet given serious attention to Laing's relationship with Blake. Where Laing's reading of Blake has been mentioned at all, it has been criticized and belittled. Thus *Studies in Romanticism*, 21.3 (1982), an issue dedicated to the future of Blake studies, includes two separate articles which make critical mention of Laing; see Morton D. Paley, 'What is to be Done?', 425-427 (p. 425), and W. J. T. Mitchell, 'Dangerous Blake', 410-416 (p. 412).

¹⁹ G. E. Bentley, *Blake Books: Annotated Catalogues of William Blake's Writings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 37.

form in the full-colour reproductions of Blake's books published by Trianon Press for the William Blake Trust between 1951 and 1976.

Some of the works of Blake scholarship published around this time make reference to the parallel phenomena of growing countercultural interest in Blake, although such references, where they exist, are always very brief and if not hostile then certainly noncommittal. Thus G. E. Bentley, in the same 1977 piece in which he describes the 'tidal wave' of recent Blake scholarship, also notes the frequent appropriation of lines from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in Sixties graffiti, but concludes only that Blake is currently 'the subject of a sub-cultural fad'.²⁰

More often in scholarship of the period, references to the parallel countercultural interest in Blake are significant by their absence. As an area of Romantic scholarship, the study of Blake's posthumous reception can itself be seen to have its origins in the 1960s, beginning with the publication of Deborah Dorfman's *Blake in the Nineteenth Century: His Reputation as a Poet From Gilchrist to Yeats* (1969).²¹ However, while Dorfman's study provides many valuable facts about Blake's late nineteenth-century reception, it offers a notably restricted view, even within the tight chronological boundaries it sets for itself. Dorfman largely ignores, for example, Blake's American reception in this period, and refuses to make any links forward to any aspect of Blake's later reception, including his countercultural popularity within the Sixties period in which Dorfman is herself writing.

An alternative history of Blake's early reception

I believe that contrary to the assumptions of much Blake scholarship in the Sixties, there are important links between Blake scholarship and Sixties counterculture, which do not form mutually exclusive categories. I have already suggested that the writing of figures such as Roszak and Laing might be considered a form of Blake scholarship, and I will explore other twentieth-century links between 'countercultural Blake' and 'academic Blake' later in the chapter, but first I want to show that there has always been an important 'countercultural' aspect to Blake's reception, from his lifetime onwards, so that Blake scholarship itself might be said to have countercultural roots. Furthermore, I want to suggest that the recognition of this long-term relationship between

²⁰ Bentley, *Blake Books*, p. 37.

²¹ Deborah Dorfman, *Blake in the Nineteenth Century: His Reputation as a Poet From Gilchrist to Yeats* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1969).

counterculture and academia also problematizes some of the dominant narratives surrounding Blake, such as the ‘rescuing’ of Blake (by one group or another) from early obscurity or neglect, and the fetishizing of this very obscurity.

As indicated by the title of Dorfman’s book, not only Blake scholarship but also popular knowledge of Blake is conventionally said to begin thirty-six years after Blake’s death with the publication of Alexander Gilchrist’s biography, *Life of William Blake, ‘Pictor Ignotus’* (1863).²² Ironically however, Gilchrist’s book had the effect not only of popularizing Blake but also, as indicated by its subtitle which categorized Blake as an ‘unknown artist’, ensuring that Blake was permanently defined by his early obscurity.

We can see his ‘outsider’ status as an important reason for his countercultural cachet in the Sixties. According to Gilchrist and also Blake’s modern biographers, Blake and his wife spent much of their lives on the breadline, and were by most definitions socially marginal figures; William was an eccentric printmaker who had no experience of formal education until he began his artisanal apprenticeship aged fourteen, while Catherine was from even further down the social scale, the daughter of a gardener, and apparently wholly illiterate when she first met Blake.²³

In terms of Blake’s Sixties and earlier Beat popularity, it was not only his status as a neglected literary outsider that made him attractive, but also his disadvantaged social background. Tropes involving the romanticization of poverty abound in Sixties and Beat literature, as for example in Ginsberg’s ‘Howl’, in which the best minds of a generation are not only ‘destroyed by madness’, but also ‘starving’ and ‘naked’. While ‘Howl’ contains many Blakean elements, not least the figure of Moloch (which combines features of Blake’s Molech with those of Urizen), the only appearance of Blake himself occurs in the form of an adjectival phrase in line six, where Ginsberg describes himself ‘hallucinating Arkansas and Blake-light tragedy among the scholars of war’. However, Blake is clearly also present in the preceding lines, which introduce the Beat archetype of ‘angelheaded hipsters’ who are not only Blakean in their ‘ancient heavenly connection to the starry dynamo in the machinery of night’ but also by virtue of their ‘poverty and tatters’. Blake’s poverty and mysticism thus make him the definitive example of the downtrodden ‘fellaheen’ who, in the Beat reading of Oswald

²² Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake, ‘Pictor Ignotus’, with Selections from his Poems and Other Writings*, 2 vols (London and Cambridge: Macmillan, 1863).

²³ See for example G. E. Bentley, *The Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 65.

Spengler, will usher in an apocalyptic New Age, as well as providing one definition of the word 'Beat' itself.²⁴

However, while Blake undoubtedly experienced some degree of poverty, he was at the same time better connected than his precarious economic status might seem to suggest. Thus he was close friends with the then-renowned artist Henry Fuseli, while through the radical publisher Joseph Johnson he became friends with Tom Paine, and had at least some acquaintance with William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft.²⁵ While we do not know if any of the figures in this group had extensive knowledge of Blake's poetry – Godwin and Wollstonecraft for example may only have known Blake as the commercial engraver of Wollstonecraft's *Original Stories from Real Life* (1791), while Fuseli and Johnson knew at least some of Blake's early poetry – we can nonetheless characterize this group of famous radicals as a significant early 'reception scene' for Blake.²⁶ Further, we can clearly characterize them as a 'counterculture' with many features in common with that of the 1960s, from radical politics to feminism and sexual liberty.

A second important reception scene during Blake's lifetime consisted of well-known writers including William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, William Hazlitt and Charles Lamb, all of whom read and commented on at least some of Blake's poems from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.²⁷ Although of course neither Blake nor any of these other writers was aware of their joint or individual status as 'Romantics' (the term was only applied to Wordsworth and Coleridge from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, and to Blake even later), it is nonetheless significant that Blake was read with interest by these other figures with whom he is now grouped. Again, as Remak and others have suggested, the Romantics themselves can be counted as a countercultural group, whose interests – in radical politics, communal living, mind-expanding drugs and alternative forms of religion and spirituality – significantly prefigure the similar concerns of Sixties counterculture.

As I explore in Chapter Three, the mixture of admiration and criticism with which Wordsworth and Blake read each other is significant in the context of their very

²⁴ See John Lardas, *The Bop Apocalypse: The Religious Visions of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs* (Illinois: Illinois University Press, 2001), which despite its title, is primarily a study of the relationship between the Beats and Spengler.

²⁵ See Bentley, *Stranger from Paradise*, pp. 103-113.

²⁶ This very useful term is introduced by John Rodden in *George Orwell: The Politics of Literary Reputation* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 2002), p. 75.

²⁷ See Bentley, *Stranger from Paradise*, p. 133.

different philosophical and political views, which can also be linked forward to their differing receptions in the 1960s. However, of all the Romantic poets it was Coleridge who had the most favourable opinion of Blake; after reading Blake's poems, he was the only one of this group who took the trouble to track the author down and meet him in person. A contemporary account claimed that 'Blake and Coleridge, when in company, seemed like congenial beings of another sphere, breathing for a while on our earth,' while Coleridge himself described Blake as 'a man of Genius'.²⁸ Coleridge's comments on Blake were not published at the time, but as we have seen he is included alongside later 'canonical' scholars of Blake in the 1970 *Critics on Blake* anthology, along with the countercultural Laing, with whom he has much in common.

Further relevant early reception scenes for Blake's work include the Transcendentalists (Emerson had already read Blake's *Songs* by 1842)²⁹ and key figures in the American abolitionist movement, whose early interest in Blake led to the publication of Blake's 'The Little Black Boy' and several other poems in a large-circulation abolitionist newspaper in 1842.³⁰ I want to suggest here that both the Transcendentalist and abolitionist movements (whose surprisingly early links to Blake have only come to light relatively recently) have obvious links forward to the countercultural and politically radical sides of the Blakean Sixties.³¹

The brief introduction I have just provided to Blake's reception in his lifetime and in the early years after his death is intended to serve several purposes. Firstly it challenges Gilchrist's claim, often repeated in later Blake scholarship such as Dorfman's *Blake in the Nineteenth Century*, that before the publication of Gilchrist's

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ See Clare Elliott, 'A Backward Glance O'er the (Dis)United States: William Blake, Ralph Waldo Emerson and the "Authentic American Religion"', *European Journal of American Culture*, 28 (2009), 75-93, and Clare Elliott, 'William Blake and America: Freedom and Violence in the Atlantic World', *Comparative American Studies*, 7 (2009), 209-224.

³⁰ See Marcus Wood, *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 182.

³¹ There is also a complex network of later links between the main British 'Blake revival' of the 1860s (which I examine shortly) and both Transcendentalism and abolitionism. Thus for example Walt Whitman (also a key Sixties influence) and the abolitionist and esotericist Moncure Conway are introduced to Blake's works in the 1860s through Anne Gilchrist and the Pre-Raphaelite circle. There is much work still to be done in this area, but see Sarah Ferguson-Wagstaffe, "'Points of Contact': Blake and Whitman", in *Sullen Fires Across the Atlantic: Essays in Transatlantic Romanticism*, ed. by Lance Newman, Joel Pace, and Chris Koenig-Woodyard (Romantic Circles, 2006) <http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/sullenfires/sfw/sfw_essay.html> [accessed 2 October 2012]; Marion Walker Alcaro, 'Gilchrist, Anne Burrows (1828-1885)', in *Walt Whitman: An Encyclopedia*, reproduced online at <http://whitmanarchive.org/criticism/current/encyclopedia/entry_79.html> [accessed 19 June 2013]; Shirley Dent and Jason Whittaker, *Radical Blake: Influence and Afterlife from 1827* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 99-101.

biography in 1863 Blake was ‘Pictor Ignotus’, an unknown artist. At the same time, I have sought to show how many of those who took an interest in William Blake during Blake’s own lifetime, whether as friends (Paine, Fuseli), acquaintances (Wollstonecraft, Godwin) or engaged readers (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Emerson), are themselves identifiable as radical or countercultural in a way that looks forward to Blake’s Sixties readership. Furthermore, the mass printing of Blake’s work in America by abolitionists can be seen as the first truly ‘popular’ response to Blake, twenty years before the publication of Gilchrist’s biography, and over a hundred years before the widespread popular appropriation of Blake’s work in the 1960s.

Although, as I have just shown, Blake was certainly not ‘unknown’ before the publication of *Life of William Blake: ‘Pictor Ignotus’* in 1863, there is good reason why the 1860s should be referred to as the ‘first Blake revival’. Gilchrist’s biography, together with Swinburne’s *William Blake: A Critical Essay* (1868), not only represented the first Blake ‘scholarship’ easily recognizable as such, but also ensured that Blake’s poetry and art gained genuinely widespread attention on both sides of the Atlantic. However, I want to suggest that the ‘countercultural’ label can also be applied to this first generation of Blake scholars of the 1860s.

The countercultural element of early Blake scholarship arises from the fact that the key Blake revivalists of the 1860s was all either actual members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood or closely linked to the Pre-Raphaelites, a movement whose controversial social stance and artistic radicalism made them the primary counterculture of the Victorian era. Thus Gilchrist’s collaborators on the biography (and those to whom the task of finishing the project fell when Gilchrist died in 1861) were not only Gilchrist’s wife Anne, but also the poet and artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his brother, the writer and critic William Michael Rossetti, founding members of Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, who had already begun collecting Blake’s works several decades earlier.³² The Rossetti brothers were also responsible for editing a companion volume containing a selection of Blake’s poetry, prose and artwork, to be published alongside the Blake biography. Although the poetry was mainly confined to Blake’s earlier lyric pieces, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti gave himself free rein to make a number of major textual alterations to Blake’s work, the publication of this volume of poems

³² This aspect of Blake’s reception history is well-known, but an excellent recent summary of the conditions of the biography’s production and its historical significance is provided in the ‘Introduction’ to *Gilchrist on Blake*, ed. by Richard Holmes (London: Harper Perennial, 2005), pp. vii-xxxix.

represented the beginning of Blake scholarship just as much as the biography itself. It also of course created for the first time the necessary conditions for a more widespread popular reception of Blake, namely the easy availability (for those who could afford it) of a large selection of Blake's poetry. This popular dissemination of Blake was assisted by the fact that (very much unlike Blake) the Pre-Raphaelite artists and writers were celebrities in their own lifetimes, and when the Rossetti-edited Blake volume was published in 1863 they were already at the height of their fame. Thus not only Blake's general readership but also Blake scholarship itself has been linked to counterculture since long before the 1960s, indeed since the beginnings of Blake scholarship as a recognizable discipline in that other 'Sixties', the 1860s.³³

Having established this point about the longstanding history of countercultural interest in Blake more generally and the history of closely intertwined relationships between the 'countercultural Blake' and the 'scholarly Blake' in particular, I would now like to take the opportunity to consider a little more critically the relationship between counterculture, radicalism and populism in relation to Blake's reception history. We should be clear firstly that the radical and countercultural movements with which Blake has been associated have always been susceptible to co-optation by the forces of conservatism, and secondly that the 'countercultural Blake' is not automatically the same as the 'popular Blake', since countercultures are also susceptible to the formation of elites.

The paradigmatic example of the first of these processes comes from within the first countercultural movement with which Blake is associated, Romanticism itself. As discussed in Chapter Three, English Romanticism can be said to contain within it the spectre of Wordsworth's later abandonment of his youthful political and poetic radicalism. Similar accusations can also be levelled at members of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. John Everett Millais infamously allowed his 1886 painting of a boy blowing bubbles to be altered so that it could serve as an advertisement for Pears Soap;³⁴ more generally the consequences of the group's fame, money, and in the case of D. G. Rossetti what might be described as a rock-star lifestyle, need to be balanced against

³³ It is also interesting to note that during the 1960s there was a revival of popular interest not only in Blake, but also in the Pre-Raphaelites themselves, thus providing another direct link between the countercultures of the 1860s and 1960s.

³⁴ In some ways this looks forward to the way in which Sixties icons including Ginsberg, Burroughs and Dylan all later allowed their work and/or countercultural image to be used in advertising. In a 1994 letter to Gary Snyder, Ginsberg explains that he reluctantly agreed to do the Gap advert, for which he received 'a lot! of money', as a fundraising effort for the Naropa Institute. See *The Selected Letters of Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder*, ed. by Bill Morgan (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2009), p. 305.

their earlier political, social, and aesthetic radicalism. The links here with Sixties counterculture and its own process of co-option by the establishment hardly need to be spelled out, but such links ironically make the Sixties interest in Pre-Raphaelite art all the more appropriate. This aspect of the link between the 1860s and 1960s is implicit in David Latham's description of how the Pre-Raphaelites, 'a revolutionary movement begun by young rebels[,] would become by the turn of the next century the subject of an upscale market-interest for the richest people from the counterculture world of the 1960s: Roger Daltry of The Who, Paul McCartney of the Beatles, Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin [all] purchase Pre-Raphaelite art'.³⁵

A further criticism that has been levelled at Blake's early radical and countercultural supporters is that of elitism. This is the argument put forward by Shirley Dent in her article "“Esoteric Blakists” and the “Weak Brethren”: How Blake Lovers Kept the Popular out".³⁶ Dent argues that a 'sense of special readers for a special poet takes hold in the major mid-nineteenth-century revival of Blake'.³⁷ Amongst other evidence for her claim, she quotes Swinburne berating William Michael Rossetti for publishing Blake's early work *Tiriel*. The tone of Swinburne's complaint is deliberately semi-comical but it nonetheless reveals the tensions between popularism and elitism within this apparently radical group of early Blake enthusiasts: '[*Tiriel*] should have been preserved, certainly, but strictly for the inspection of esoteric Blakists – never to be exposed to the eyes of Saducees, neophytes, weak brethren'.³⁸ While Dent's accusations of elitism specifically concern Blake's 1860s reception, her observations can usefully be extended and applied to his countercultural reception in the 1960s. Indeed Dent herself points in this direction when she argues that 'the Victorian Blake revival as we know it – Gilchrist's *Life* and Swinburne's *Critical Essay* – had little to with encouraging a popular *understanding* of Blake and ironically set in train a *pop culture* misconception of Blake as a poet best suited to sub- and countercultures, a hallmark of the esoteric and obscure'.³⁹

³⁵ David Latham, 'Haunted Texts: The Invention of Pre-Raphaelite Studies', in *Haunted Texts: Studies in Pre-Raphaelitism*, ed. by David Latham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), pp. 1-34.

³⁶ Shirley Dent, "“Esoteric Blakists” and the “Weak Brethren”: How Blake Lovers Kept the Popular out", in *Blake, Modernity and Popular Culture*, ed. by Steve Clark and Jason Whittaker (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 57-68.

³⁷ Dent, p. 57.

³⁸ Quoted in Dent, p. 59.

³⁹ Dent, p. 57. Emphasis in original.

While an association of Blake with ‘the esoteric and obscure’, from Eastern mysticism to the Tarot,⁴⁰ was indeed an important part of his Sixties reception, as I have noted, such syncretism and esotericism is not necessarily un-Blakean. However, we should recognize Dent’s central point that countercultural reception is not automatically equivalent to popular reception. Dent’s critical analysis serves as another reminder that the complex relationship between ‘scholarly Blake’, ‘countercultural Blake’ and ‘popular Blake’ pre-dates the twentieth century.

Blake in Sixties popular culture

In continuing my investigation of the complex, sometimes problematic links between Blake’s popular, academic and countercultural reception scenes, I want to turn now once again to the Sixties themselves, and especially to the ‘popular’ element of Blake’s Sixties reception. It should be apparent from my Introduction that Blake was involved in many aspects of the Sixties counterculture that were not confined to the page, from his posthumous involvement in Sixties anti-war protests, to his wide-ranging influence on the music of the period.

One of the clearest examples of Blake’s popular presence in the Sixties, although also amongst the hardest to investigate, is the influence of Blake’s visual work on the distinctive psychedelic style of Sixties concert posters, with their Blakean tendrils, swirls and flame-like forms, and especially their tendency towards an organic merging of text and image. All of these elements are strongly reminiscent of Blake’s individual prints and paintings, but more especially of the designs Blake drew around and within the text of the poems themselves. From a practical perspective, the fact that much of Blake’s art was originally designed so that it could be reproduced on his own printing press also made his visual style particularly applicable to the poster format of much Sixties psychedelic art.

This Blakean influence on the psychedelic art of the Sixties arrived not only directly from Blake’s works themselves but also indirectly via the Pre-Raphaelites (and the subsequent Art Nouveau movement), who were not only closely involved in early Blake scholarship, but were also strongly influenced by Blake’s artistic style and whose own visual work in turn influenced Sixties psychedelia.

⁴⁰ Inevitably, there exists a set of Blake-inspired Tarot cards, designed to ‘free Blake from intellectual bondage’. See <<http://www.blaketarot.com>> [accessed 18 June 2013].

Although scholars such as Jonathan Harris have previously drawn attention to the basic fact of Blake's influence on '[p]sychedelia as socio-cultural style', very little detailed work has been done on this important area of Blake's Sixties reception.⁴¹ My own primary focus in this study is on the literary aspect of Blake's Sixties presence, but in the course of my research I have discovered one very clear but previously unnoted example of Blake's visual influence on what I want to suggest is a particularly representative text of Sixties, which I will now examine. This is the original publicly-distributed version of Timothy Leary's 1970 'prison escape letter', printed on newsprint as a double-sided broadside along with 'Communiqué Number 4' of the Weather Underground organization, which had assisted Leary's escape from the California jail where he was serving a ten-year sentence for drugs offences. Both sides of the broadside (see Figures 3 and 4 below) are surrounded by an illustrative border that represents a detailed and clearly deliberate copy of Blake's artistic style (represented by Figure 5 below), so that the text as a whole combines radical politics with psychedelia, in both the original drug-related sense of the word and in the sense of the visual style influenced by Blake.

⁴¹ Jonathan Harris, 'Abstraction and Empathy: Psychedelic Distortion and the Meaning of the 1960s', in *Summer of Love: Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis and Counterculture in the 1960s*, ed. by Christoph Grunenberg and Jonathan Harris (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), pp. 9-18 (p. 11). Although Harris mentions Blake alongside Aubrey Beardsley and William Morris, he does not note the influence of Blake on these later artists.

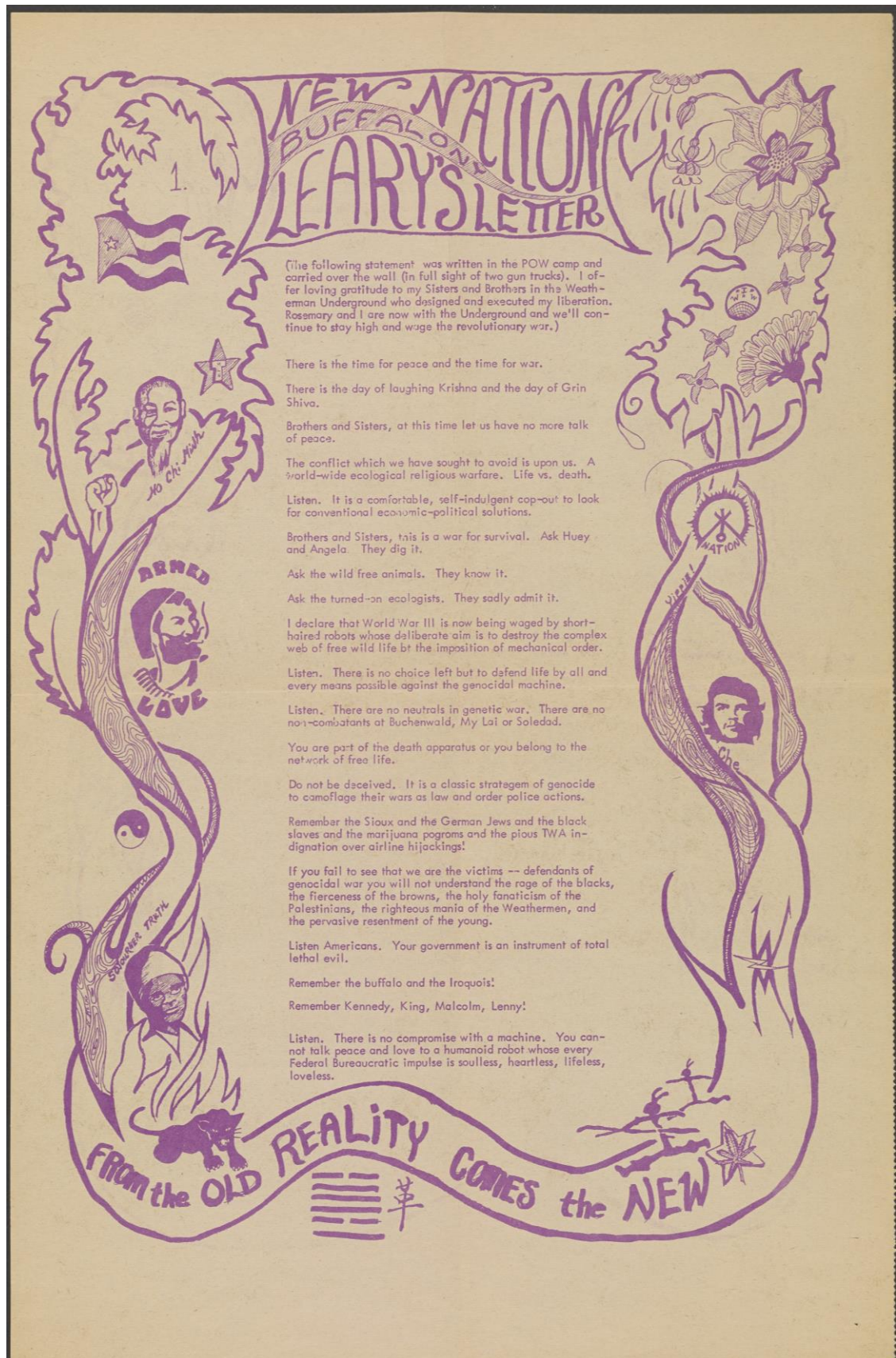


Figure 3. Front of a 1970 broadside, showing the first part of Timothy Leary's 'prison escape letter', surrounded by a Blakean illustrative border. Courtesy of University of Virginia Library, Special Collections.

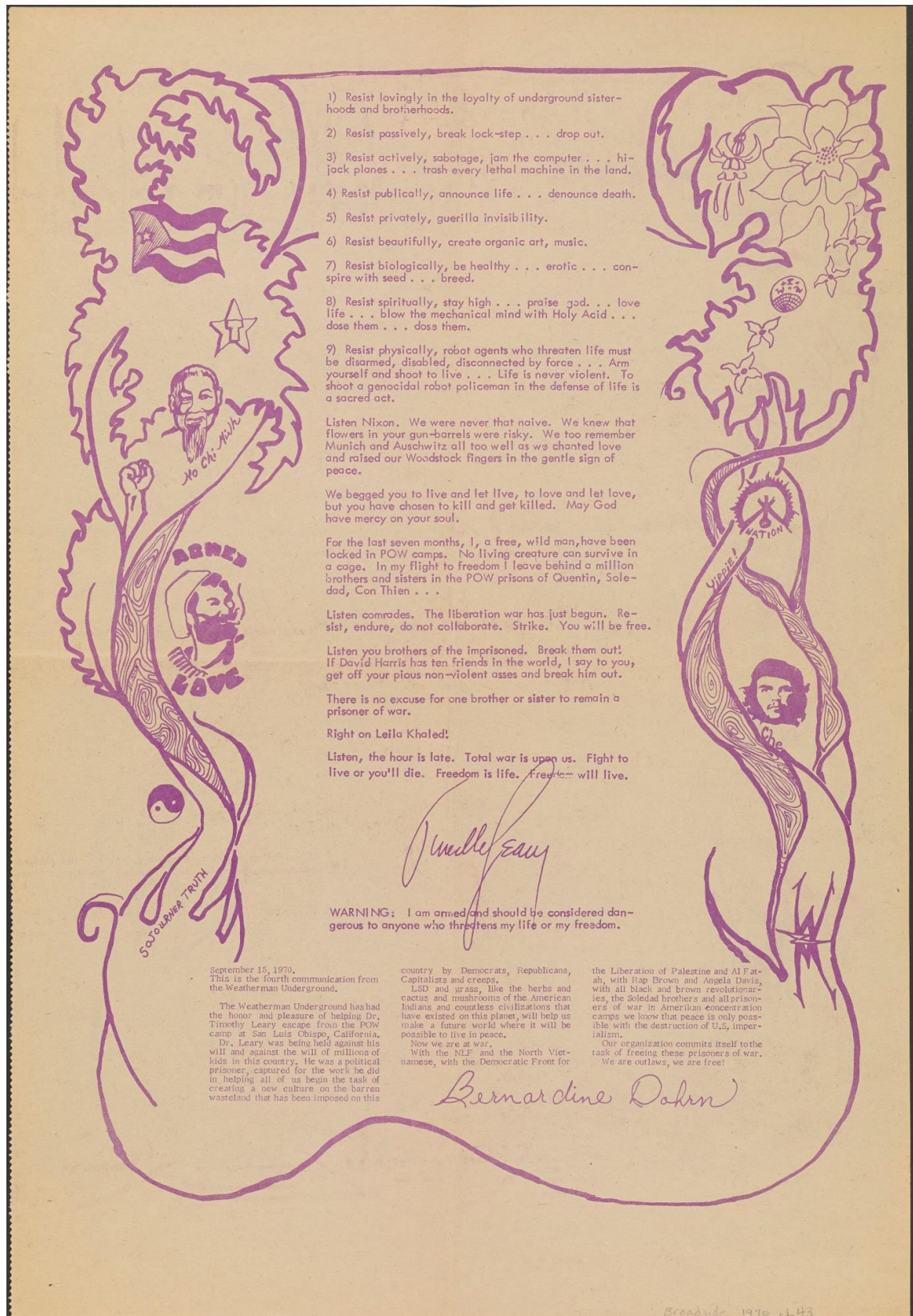


Figure 4. Reverse of the broadside, showing the second part of Leary's letter, and 'Communiqué Number 4' of the Weather Underground organization. Courtesy of University of Virginia Library, Special Collections.



Figure 5. 'The Divine Image', from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (Copy T), showing Blake's distinctive illustrative style. © Trustees of the British Museum.

The reproduction of Blake's visual style in this particular broadside text also seems historically appropriate, since the broadside publishing format played an important part in the radical politics of Blake's own time, and was used to distribute the political propaganda of figures including Blake's friend Tom Paine.

The Leary/Weatherman broadside reflects the original use of the format, since it combines news (a public announcement of Leary's escape) with radical propaganda. It is also a typical Sixties text in that it combines the psychedelic with the political. In the

signed Weather Underground communiqué which occupies the bottom half of the second page of the broadside, Bernardine Dohrn explains that while the Weather Underground believe that ‘peace is only possible with the destruction of U. S. imperialism’, they also share Leary’s belief that ‘LSD and grass [...] will help us make a future world where it will be possible to live in peace’.⁴² Although it is not clear who was responsible for the illustration on the broadside, its combination of Blake’s art with Leary’s drugs and the radical politics of the Weather Underground makes it a good example of Blake’s interaction with the various strands of Sixties counterculture.

Thus not only does the broadside draw on the revolutionary history of the 1790s in which Blake played a part, but it also gives Blake himself a distinctive Sixties political identity. This is achieved not only through the combination of Blake’s visual style with Leary and Dohrn’s text, but also through the inclusion of small pictures of Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara, a black panther, and various other Sixties motifs, which are nestled within the typically Blakean flame/tendrill/flower design. A further link between the two periods (and more specifically to Blake’s early American popular reception as just discussed) is made by the inclusion alongside these Sixties icons of an image of Sojourner Truth, the nineteenth-century African-American abolitionist and women’s rights activist.

Finally, it is also noteworthy that an inscription reading ‘FROM the OLD REALITY COMES the NEW’ is placed within the design at the bottom of the first page of the broadside. While this seems primarily intended to convey the basic message that a new age will emerge from out of the present circumstances of the Sixties, it can also be read as making a link between the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century radical traditions represented by Blake and Sojourner Truth and the neo-Blakean ‘New Age’ represented by Sixties themselves. The phrase ‘from the old reality comes the new’ is also Blakean in its millennialism, and thus sounds like a Blakean aphorism (although it is not). I will explore the broader relationship between Blake’s proverbs and the aphoristic tendencies of the Sixties shortly.

Further evidence of Blake’s popular presence in the 1960s can be found in the history of British alternative theatre, which literally brought Blake onto the streets in politically-charged performances that had certain similarities with Ginsberg’s vocal

⁴² Timothy Leary, and Bernadine Dohrn, *New nation: Buffalo NY, Leary’s letter: from the old reality comes the new* (University of Virginia, Special Collections: Broadside 1970 .L43).

appropriation of Blake at American anti-war protests. In his memoir, John Fox, founder of the theatre group Welfare State International, describes how their 'first gig' was an 'interpretation' of Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, performed in a park in Lancaster in December 1968. It featured 'a strange pot-pourri of stilt-walkers, fire-eaters, speciality performing bear, Punch and Judy, trade-union banners and radical student dissent', and after the play had officially finished, 'the whole patchwork of artists and audience' – including Fox's ten day old son, to whom he had given the middle name Blake – erupted into the town centre, 'chanting liberation slogans at institutions such as a boarding school, a prison and a stranded police car', resulting in the arrest of one of the troupe.⁴³ Fox concluded that with Blake's help, 'Art [...] had broken out of the frame.'⁴⁴

Another of the participants in Fox's play, chanting Blake's aphorisms into a loudspeaker made from a baby alarm, was the poet Adrian Mitchell, who three years earlier had performed with Ginsberg at the Blake-infused 'International Poetry Incarnation', a key event in the British Sixties which I discuss further in Chapter Three.⁴⁵ Mitchell would go on to write his own play about Blake's life and reception, *Tyger* (which features Ginsberg as a character), staged at London's National Theatre in 1971.⁴⁶

As previously mentioned, Blake's work also appeared on the streets in this period as graffiti. Lines from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* were particularly common, such as 'Energy is Eternal Delight' (E34), 'The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom' (E35), and 'The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction' (E37). This last aphorism often appeared on the walls of libraries and on university campuses, but was also painted in other locations, for example featuring prominently on a wall next to a London recording studio where a number of notable rock, folk and reggae albums of the Sixties and Seventies were recorded.⁴⁷ The history of this particular piece of graffiti also reveals evidence of the more general interest in Romanticism within Sixties counterculture, which extended beyond Blake himself. As Sam Cooper has shown, the graffiti was the work of the 'English Situationist' group

⁴³ John Fox, *Eyes on Stalks* (London: Methuen, 2002), p. 15.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Fox, p. viii.

⁴⁶ Adrian Mitchell, *Tyger: A Celebration, based on the life and work of William Blake* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971).

⁴⁷ Photographs of this piece of graffiti can be seen in Roger Perry, *The Writing on the Wall: The Graffiti of London* (London: Elm Tree Books, 1976), p. 50, and on the sleeve of the 1975 *Greatest Hits* album by Cat Stevens.

King Mob, whose other graffiti in the same Notting Hill area included lines by Coleridge, and who had adopted the name King Mob as an allusion to the slogan used during the Gordon Riots of 1780, which Blake had witnessed at first hand (and perhaps been more directly involved in).⁴⁸

As I explore in Chapter Three, the Romanticism of the Sixties also extends to Wordsworth, as well as to Keats and Shelley; clearly however, Blake's radical politics and outsider status made him particularly attractive to groups such as King Mob. Blake features in a special edition of the underground magazine *Rebel Worker* which members of King Mob helped produce in 1966, where he is listed amongst 'those whom we can unhesitatingly affirm as precursors of our own theoretical and practical activity', although it is also noted that 'editions of his own works printed by William Blake are highly prized by cretinous bourgeois collectors (let us spit in their faces and note in passing that everything he wrote spits in their faces, too).'⁴⁹ Once again here, we can see a complex interrelationship between the various Sixties approaches to Blake: popular, scholarly and countercultural.

Graffiti was a medium for which Blake's aphoristic texts were particularly well suited. His lines were not only directly appropriated in Sixties graffiti but also imitated, as in the distinctly Blakean-sounding slogan 'All power to the Imagination'.⁵⁰ Alternatively, they could be consciously adapted or détourned, as in 'The Panthers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction'.⁵¹ Indeed, I want to suggest that Blake's attraction in the Sixties has much to do with the aphoristic nature of the Sixties themselves, evident for example in Leary's famous encouragement to 'turn on, tune in, drop out'.

⁴⁸ Sam Cooper, 'The Peculiar Romanticism of the English Situationists', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 42 (2013), 20-37. Cooper does not seem aware of the extent of the connection between Blake and the Gordon Riots, stating that while 'the English Situationists imagined [the Gordon Rioters] as their precursors [...] those writers whom we now identify as the first wave of English Romantic poets are not often placed in such an assemblage of rioters and saboteurs' (p. 23). However, Blake's first biographer Alexander Gilchrist describes how Blake was involuntarily caught up in the mass of rioters and forced 'to go along in the very front rank' (*Life of William Blake, 'Pictor Ignotus'*, p. 35). While subsequent biographies of Blake, including recent works by G. E. Bentley and John Beer, have generally accepted Gilchrist's account at face value, Peter Ackroyd is surely right to suggest that Blake may well have joined this mob willingly (Ackroyd, *Blake* [London: Vintage, 1999], pp. 70-71).

⁴⁹ Franklin Rosemont, 'Souvenirs of the Future: Precursors of the Theory & Practice of Total Liberation' (*Rebel Worker* 6), reprinted in *King Mob Echo: English Section of the Situationist International*, ed. by Tom Vague (London: Dark Star, 2000), pp. 8-10. *King Mob Echo* also contains a (poor quality) reproduction of Roger Perry's photo of the Notting Hill Blake graffiti (p. 96).

⁵⁰ Quoted in Jackie DiSalvo, 'The World Turned Upside Down: The Alternative Press and Visionary Politics in the US in the 1960s', in *An American Half-century: Postwar Culture and Politics in the USA*, ed. by Michael Klein (London and Boulder, CO: Pluto Press, 1994), pp. 69-81 (p. 69).

⁵¹ Quoted in DiSalvo, 'The World Turned Upside Down', p. 74.

Elsewhere in this study, I put forward a number of pieces of evidence to show that the textual engagement with Blake's work in Sixties counterculture reaches beyond the relatively accessible works such as *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, to also include his more demanding prophetic books. However, there can be no doubt that it is the aphorisms of *Marriage* (along with key lines from the *Songs*, 'Auguries of Innocence' and the 'Preface' to *Milton*) that have the widest circulation in popular culture, both now and in the Sixties. In particular, Blake's assertion in *Marriage* that 'If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite' (E39) can be seen as the primary Blakean text of the Sixties, providing for example a title for Aldous Huxley's influential 1954 account of his mescaline experiments, *The Doors of Perception*, and a name for the band The Doors.

As we have seen, within Blake scholarship of the Sixties, references to the widespread popular-cultural appropriation of his aphorisms are frequently disparaging. I want to therefore address the question of whether the non-contextualized recycling of such small fragments of Blake's texts might indeed make Sixties counterculture somehow less authentically Blakean than other literary or scholarly reception scenes. This seems to be the suggestion of M. K. Nurmi in his 1975 book *William Blake*, in which he admiringly draws attention to the 'extensive and exact' knowledge of Blake demonstrated by certain modern poets (including Ginsberg), but claims nonetheless that this more obviously literary side of Blake's Sixties influence must be 'sharply distinguished from the currency Blake has found among the psychedelic generation, in which he has been taken as the prophet of a mindless "turning on" and letting go of everything but free floating images of the individual psyche.'⁵² According to Nurmi, Blake 'would have been horrified' at this aspect of his Sixties reception.⁵³ It seems that Nurmi's strategy of separating Ginsberg from 'the psychedelic generation' is part of an effort to ensure that Blake remains within a culture that is 'literary' rather than popular. However, in theoretical terms, what should we make of the overall suggestion that Blake's value is debased by his use as a countercultural 'currency' which consists of a series of aphorisms and 'free floating images'? After all, as I have just demonstrated, this was indeed one of the primary ways in which Blake was materially distributed in the Sixties.

⁵² M. K. Nurmi, *William Blake* (London: Hutchinson, 1975), p. 12.

⁵³ Ibid.

In approaching this question, I want to return to Mike Goode's important 2006 article 'Blakespotting'. Part of Goode's argument – which is not specifically focused on Blake's Sixties reception but which seems particularly applicable to it – is that 'Blake's proverblike poetry actively encourages readers to appropriate and resituate its lines'.⁵⁴ Goode suggests that appropriation is the ultimate 'ambition' of the proverb form itself, and that there is therefore a political and 'tactical' dimension to Blake's use of this form: 'Blake perhaps sought in the proverb a way to circulate messages along unpredictable routes, as well as through the agency of even people who might be unsympathetic to his messages.'⁵⁵ If this is the case, then the ideal reader of Blake is not the 'initiated Blake reader', but their very opposite.⁵⁶

However, a further element of Goode's argument relates to the inherently fragmentary nature of Blake's work, which goes beyond his frequent use of aphorism. No reader in Blake's own time would have had access to more than a few fragments of his complete corpus, and if we consider that each hand-printed, hand-coloured, differently ordered copy of any single work by Blake is in some senses a separate work, then the possibility of a unified or complete reading of Blake's work becomes impossible (although the online *Blake Archive* now allows for greater access to different copies of the same work than has ever been possible before).⁵⁷

A similar approach to Blake, although with a less theoretical emphasis, has been advocated by John Beer, who suggests that the impact of certain lines in Blake 'is actually diminished if read with what comes before and after: they need to resonate within the bounds of their own suggestiveness.'⁵⁸ As Beer also points out, Blake's readers and viewers have always appropriated the most attractive fragments of his work, as indicated by the comments of Blake's friend and fellow artist Henry Fuseli, who described Blake as 'damned good to steal from'.⁵⁹

There is an obvious attractiveness to Goode's provocative idea that Blake might have welcomed not only appropriations but even what seem to be misreadings and misquotations of his work, secure in the knowledge that something of the text's

⁵⁴ Mike Goode, 'Blakespotting', *PMLA* 121 (2006), 769-786 (p. 776).

⁵⁵ Goode, p. 782.

⁵⁶ Goode, p. 783.

⁵⁷ Morris Eaves, Robert N. Essick, and Joseph Viscomi, eds., *The William Blake Archive* <<http://www.blakearchive.org/>> [accessed 28 May 2014].

⁵⁸ John Beer, *William Blake: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 149.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

‘potential energies’ would survive or even be amplified in this way.⁶⁰ After all, Blake himself seemed to take pride in discovering a meaning in *Paradise Lost* that Milton was unaware of, suggesting in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that ‘The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it’ (E35). That this reading of Milton, which Blake himself seems to condone, is spoken in ‘The voice of the Devil’ only serves to further challenge and complicate notions of authorial authority. Similarly, in the closing couplet of ‘The Everlasting Gospel’, Blake draws attention to the apparent instability of the most canonical text of all: ‘Both read the Bible day & night / But thou readst black where I read white’ (E524).

However, whether or not we agree with Goode, or with Beer’s similar suggestion that individual lines of Blake ‘need to resonate within the bounds of their own suggestiveness’, Beer’s second point is unarguable; Blake has always been ‘damned good to steal from’. There is nothing new about the Sixties popular and countercultural habit of appropriating Blake’s most attractive lines.

Twentieth-century Blake scholarship as a countercultural practice

I have suggested that just as radicalism or counterculture were essential elements of Blake’s earliest reception scenes, from the English Romantics to the American Transcendentalists and abolitionists, so too did the countercultural bohemia of the Pre-Raphaelites give birth to Blake scholarship itself in the 1860s. That the next major edition of Blake’s works after that of the Rossetti brothers was edited by William Butler Yeats, a writer who embraced both esotericism and political revolution, only serves to confirm this thesis. However, while D. G. and W. M. Rossetti and W. B. Yeats played essential roles in the history of Blake’s reception, they belong to a distant and very different era of scholarship, in which it seemed acceptable to silently rewrite sections of Blake’s verse, as D. G. Rossetti did, or to invent a wholly fictitious Irish ancestry for Blake, as Yeats did. In the often-repeated narrative of Blake’s reception, the reliable Blake scholarship of the modern era is therefore said to begin in the 1920s, with Geoffrey Keynes’s *Bibliography of William Blake* (1921) and S. Foster Damon’s *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* (1924).

⁶⁰ Goode, p. 771.

Yet even here, at the beginning of modern Blake scholarship, we can detect what seems not so much a remnant of the bohemian Pre-Raphaelites or the mystical Yeats, but rather a foreshadowing of the countercultural approaches to Blake of the 1960s. One fact which is still apparently unnoted within the world of Blake scholarship, but which was discovered with delight by Allen Ginsberg in the late 1960s, is that S. Foster Damon was experimenting with the mind-expanding properties of the peyote cactus as early as 1919, decades before the psychedelic Sixties or even the Beat era.⁶¹ Furthermore, as Damon told Ginsberg when he met him late in his life, he felt that his peyote visions had given him important insights into Blake. According to Ginsberg, 'Damon concluded that rare beings like Blake are born with physiologic gift of such vision, continuous or intermittent.'⁶² As we will see in the next chapter, this 'visionary' approach to the study of Blake has strong similarities with the approach taken by Aldous Huxley and by Ginsberg himself. It is also significant that while Ginsberg retold the story of Damon's peyote visions in several lectures, the main published version of the story occurs in Ginsberg's introduction to Timothy Leary's *Politics of Ecstasy* (1968), in which Ginsberg explicitly sets the story in the context of what he sees as a continuous psychedelic mode of the twentieth century, a mode that also links back to a more ancient shamanic era, before what he calls (combining two quotes from Blake) 'the closing of the doors of perception on nature's naked human form divine.'⁶³

There is of course one major difference between Damon's peyote-assisted Blake scholarship and the later visionary approach to Blake taken by Ginsberg and Huxley, which is that there is virtually no acknowledgment of Damon's psychedelic technique in Damon's own published work. Indeed, it is significant that the only such reference I have been able to locate occurs in Damon's late work *A Blake Dictionary*, first published in 1965, in the midst of the Sixties Blake boom. Even here, the drug reference is so minor that it could easily be missed. In the dictionary's entry on 'Vision', Damon describes Blake's art as having 'a vividness and completeness comparable to the color-visions of peyote'.⁶⁴ However, this small piece of evidence suggests that the

⁶¹ See Allen Ginsberg, *Allen Verbatim: Lectures on Poetry, Politics, Consciousness*, ed. by Gordon Ball (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), p. 32.

⁶² See Allen Ginsberg, 'Prefatory Remarks Concerning Leary's Politics of Ecstasy,' in *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays by Allen Ginsberg, 1952-1995*, edited by Bill Morgan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), p. 109.

⁶³ Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose*, p. 110.

⁶⁴ S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (1965; repr. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2013), p. 436.

‘countercultural Blake’ and the ‘academic Blake’ were not so far removed from each other as they seemed to some other scholars in the period.

Clearly, for some Romanticist scholars during the Sixties, the idea that there was a direct link between their own Romantic subjects and elements of the current counterculture, especially the parallel drug cultures of the two eras, seemed more of a threat than an opportunity. Thus for example we have seen M. K. Nurmi speaking on Blake’s behalf against ‘the psychedelic generation’. Similarly, when in 1968 Alethea Hayter published her study *Opium and the Romantic Imagination*, concerning the relationship between drugs and Romanticism in the work of De Quincey, Coleridge, Baudelaire and others, she made several references to the obvious links with the current counterculture, but seemed anxious to point out that she had in fact planned the study some years earlier, when the subject was much less topical. She assured the reader that the Romantic subjects of her ‘unsensational literary analysis’ were ‘adults of creative genius and wide learning’, quite unlike the ‘drug addict of today’.⁶⁵ For her own part, ‘no curiosity or wish for new experience could nerve me to enter such a world of wretchedness.’⁶⁶ Yet despite all Hayter’s protestations of the distance between subject, author, and contemporary context, she nonetheless could not resist closing the final chapter of her ‘unsensational literary analysis’ with her own impressionistic (and apparently fictional) portrayal of an opium vision.

Naturally, this anxious, conflicted attitude to the links between Romanticism and the Sixties was not shared by all scholars of the period. Michael Ferber, later the author of the important historicist study *The Social Vision of William Blake* (1985), was a co-defendant in the 1969 ‘Dr Spock’ trial of draft resisters, and remembered at a later protest carrying a placard bearing Blake’s slogan ‘The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.’⁶⁷ Another noted Blake scholar, Alicia Ostriker, editor of a collected edition of Blake’s works (and also of one of the first scholarly articles on the links between Blake and Ginsberg), has written about the Sixties origins of her ‘romance with Blake’: ‘For a brief period Blake was spokesperson to a generation; it seemed he knew whatever there was to know about destroying tyranny within the self

⁶⁵ Alethea Hayter, *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (London: Faber, 1968), p. 12.

⁶⁶ Hayter, p. 342.

⁶⁷ Personal email communication, 22 October 2012.

and within society; from his allegorical method I first discovered the interpenetration of the personal and the political in all our lives.’⁶⁸

The countercultural credentials of another important twentieth-century Blake scholar, Mark Schorer – author of *William Blake: The Politics of Vision* (1945) – arise not only out of his scholarly role in returning the attention of Blake scholarship to the radical politics of the 1790s, but also from his role as the principal defence witness at the 1957 ‘Howl’ obscenity trial, during which he steadfastly insisted that Ginsberg’s ‘obscene’ words could not be replaced, or the surrealistic lines translated into clear prose, without changing the overall meaning of this literary work.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, in the figure of Allen Ginsberg himself, there is an obvious crossover between the ‘countercultural Blake’ and the ‘academic Blake’. At various points in this study, I draw on some of the huge number of lectures and classes that Ginsberg gave on Blake from the late 1960s onwards at a number of American universities, but particular at the Naropa Institute that he helped found in 1974.⁷⁰

Finally, I also want to suggest that there are parallel sets of Blakean ‘contraries’ to be found in Sixties counterculture and twentieth-century Blake studies, an understanding of which can help reveal some of the reasons for the overall attraction of Blake in the Sixties.

Various surveys of Blake’s reception have concluded that by the time Blake scholarship became a growth industry in the 1960s there were two broad schools of Blake scholars, so-called ‘systematizers’ and historicists, both of which groups had their recent origins in the Blake scholarship of the 1940s and 1950s (although arguably we can trace their roots back much further).⁷¹ According to this now widely accepted schematization of Blake scholarship, the primary focus of the systematizers is on a mostly ahistorical and apolitical explication and decoding of the mythic and

⁶⁸ Alicia Ostriker, ‘The Road of Excess: My William Blake’, in *The Romantics and Us: Essays on Literature and Culture*, ed. by Gene W. Ruoff (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), pp. 67–88 (pp. 68, 71).

⁶⁹ See *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile, Transcript and Variant Versions*, ed. by Barry Miles (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1987), p. 172.

⁷⁰ This treasure trove of material, much of which is now available online, some transcribed but mostly as original audio recordings, has only just started to be investigated by scholars. The most significant work to be published thus far which specifically treats Ginsberg as a Blake scholar is Franca Bellarsi, ‘Allen Ginsberg’s Re-Reading of William Blake’s “Spiritual War”’, *University of Bucharest Review*, 8.3 (2006), 42–49.

⁷¹ See for example the ‘Introduction’ to *Palgrave Advances in William Blake Studies*, ed. by Nicholas M. Williams (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), the ‘Introduction’ to *Blake, Politics, and History*, ed. by Jackie DiSalvo, G. A. Rosso, and Christopher Z. Hobson (New York and London: Garland, 1998), and Joseph Wittreich, ‘Laboring Into Futurity: A Response,’ in *Blake, Politics, and History*.

psychological elements in Blake's work. They are represented paradigmatically by Northrop Frye (whose key work of Blake scholarship, *Fearful Symmetry*, was published in 1947), and during the 1960s in particular by Harold Bloom. However, we should note that this school of 'systematizers' is a broad one, encompassing as it does the many different (and often contradictory) systems which Blake's work has been taken to represent over the years.

On the other side of Blake scholarship a more historicist, politicized school can be identified, which focuses on the social and political elements in Blake's work. This 'historicist' school is most obviously represented by David Erdman, whose key work of historicist Blake scholarship, *Prophet Against Empire*, was published in 1954. However a similar emphasis can also be seen in earlier texts such as Jacob Bronowski's *A Man Without a Mask* (1943), and Mark Schorer's *The Politics of Vision* (1945).

I recognize of course that to simply divide all Blake scholars into systematizers and historicists is to enforce rather a crude (and systemic) distinction. However, despite these reservations, this binary categorization of Blake scholarship has often proved to be useful; for my own purposes it also serves once again to problematize another crude dichotomy, that of the countercultural Blake versus the academic Blake.

Thus in America, Britain, and to some extent also in continental Europe, the alternative culture of the Sixties can be divided between, on the one hand, those popularly known as 'hippies'⁷² who were primarily interested in the possibility of a revolution of consciousness created through the use of drugs, Eastern religion, and Western esotericism, and on the other hand the 'New Left', who were primarily concerned with forms of revolt that are more overtly political in nature.⁷³ This, I want to argue, corresponds to the split that defines academic Blake studies in the twentieth century, between politically-informed historicists and mythographically-focused 'systematizers'. As I show in Chapter Three, Allen Ginsberg's own Blake scholarship can be seen to combine elements of both approaches, but I also want to suggest that the broader countercultural and radical interest in Blake in the Sixties can similarly be seen

⁷² The term 'hippie' (sometimes spelt 'hippy' in the UK) is not unproblematic, not least because during the Sixties themselves, the term was rarely self-applied, with many people within the counterculture preferring the term 'freak' or 'head'. However, 'hippie' has long been widely used and understood, and from the late Sixties onwards it also began to be self-applied.

⁷³ This also corresponds to Marianne DeKoven's differentiation between the 'radical' and the 'countercultural' sides of the Sixties, although I have preferred to use the term 'counterculture' more broadly, recognizing that it also contains a political element. See DeKoven, p. 3.

to be both 'systematist' and 'historicist', interested in Blake as a visionary or a mystic and as a political revolutionary.

In thus examining and linking a number of apparently contrasting approaches to Blake's work, academia and counterculture, systematizers and historicists, Hippies and New Left, we should keep in mind the emphasis that Blake himself places on the concept of 'contraries', particularly his assertions that 'Without Contraries is no progression' (MHH 3, E34) and that 'Contraries are Positives / A Negation is not a Contrary' (M 30, E129). I suggest therefore that the diverse range of academic, countercultural and popular responses to Blake's work that emerged both before and during the Sixties, while often in tension with each other, should nonetheless be seen from a Blakean point of view, as a series of 'positive' contraries rather than as negations of each other.

Chapter Two:

Visionary Blake, Physical Blake, Psychedelic Blake

It should by now be apparent that Allen Ginsberg has a crucial role to play in the story of Blake's reception in the Sixties. The link between Ginsberg and Blake has already received some critical attention, certainly more so than any other aspect of the broad topic of 'Blake in the 1960s'. Thus for example several of the recent works on Blake's reception that I mentioned in the previous chapter include at least some discussion of Ginsberg.¹ Furthermore, as we might expect, attention has also been paid to this topic by scholars whose main area of expertise revolves around Ginsberg and the Beats. The extent of Blake's influence on Ginsberg's life and work is such that almost every book or article on Ginsberg includes some reference to Blake, however brief, but there are also several Beat-focused scholars who have examined this relationship in more detail; I am thinking particularly here of the important scholarly work undertaken by both Franca Bellarsi and Tony Trigilio, both of whom have also investigated the complex way in which Blake interacts with Buddhism in Ginsberg's poetry and thought.²

Nonetheless, this is a relationship about which there is still a great deal more to be said, both from a Romanticist perspective and also for scholars of twentieth-century American poetry and culture. My own examination of this topic, in this chapter and elsewhere, will focus in detail on certain aspects that I feel have not received sufficient critical attention, but in also attempting to link the relationship between Blake and Ginsberg to a definition of the Sixties themselves as Blakean, I hope to offer a new framework within which to consider the relationship between the two poets.

While recognizing the interconnectedness of Ginsberg's work with that of others who contributed to Sixties interest in Blake, one of my main arguments in this chapter is

¹ See for example Alicia Ostriker, 'Blake, Ginsberg, Madness, and the Prophet as Shaman', in *William Blake and the Moderns*, ed. by Robert J. Bertholf and Annette S. Levitt (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982), pp. 111-131; 'Blake, Emancipation and America', in Shirley Dent and Jason Whittaker, *Radical Blake: Influence and Afterlife from 1827* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 96-119; 'Two American Disciples of Blake: Robert Duncan and Allen Ginsberg', in Edward Larrissy, *Blake and Modern Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 108-124.

² See for example Franca Bellarsi, 'Allen Ginsberg's Re-Reading of William Blake's "Spiritual War"', *University of Bucharest Review*, 8.3 (2006), 42-49; Franca Bellarsi, 'William Blake and Allen Ginsberg: Imagination as a Mirror of Vacuity', *The Blake Journal*, 5 (2000), 71-86; Tony Trigilio, *Allen Ginsberg's Buddhist Poetics* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997); Tony Trigilio, *'Strange Prophecies Anew': Rereading Apocalypse in Blake, H. D., and Ginsberg* (Cranbury, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2000).

that Ginsberg's role extends beyond the popularization of Blake *within* the Sixties, and that Ginsberg (and through him, Blake) in fact plays a more fundamental role in the *creation* of the Sixties, thus manifesting a counterculture that is Blakean. In particular, I want to suggest that in some respects Ginsberg's 1948 'Blake vision', which I have already referred to in the previous chapter and which I examine in more detail here, can be seen to mark the beginning of the 'long Sixties', representing an original creative spark for the Blakean counterculture of the Sixties and the Beat movement that preceded it.

Additionally, I want to suggest that in the years following the vision, Ginsberg develops a 'psychedelic' understanding of the influence of Blake's poetry on the mind, in the sense that Blake's poetry is envisaged as having a direct psychoactive and 'mind-revealing' effect on the reader or listener. At the end of the chapter, I briefly suggest that analogous theories of the relationship between Blake's poetry, psychoactive drugs, and consciousness itself can be found in the work of another psychedelic pioneer, Aldous Huxley.

Ginsberg's Blake vision as Sixties point of origin

In the summer of 1948, as a twenty-one year old student, Ginsberg had a series of consciousness-expanding experiences, which took place over the course of several days and were by turns blissful, absurd and frightening. They were not only Blakean in the sense that they seemed to mirror Blake's own visionary experiences, but also in the sense that they were directly linked to, and even stimulated by, Blake's poetry. Later, Ginsberg began to refer to these 1948 events as his 'Blake vision', a term I also use here, even though these were in fact multiple events, and in so far as they involved a manifestation of Blake's presence this was experienced in an auditory rather than a visual form.

It is also significant – not least because Ginsberg himself made much of this point – that despite Ginsberg's lifelong interest in mind-altering substances, these 1948 experiences were not drug-induced.³ Indeed, Ginsberg's introduction to what would soon come to be known as 'psychedelic' drugs only occurred after the 'Blake vision'.

³ For Ginsberg's emphasis that his Blake vision was 'natural' (Ginsberg's own term), see for example his letter of June 10, 1960 to William Burroughs, in *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, ed. by Bill Morgan (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2008), pp. 230-233.

More significantly, according to Ginsberg himself, his early experiments with a range of such drugs – beginning with his first peyote trip in 1952 and continuing through his first use of LSD in 1959 and of ayahuasca (yagé) and psilocybin in 1960 – were primarily focused on recapturing or recreating the essence of his ‘natural’ Blake vision.⁴

The Blake vision became a defining part of the narrative not only of Ginsberg’s life, but also of the Beat movement more generally. Over the course of his life, Ginsberg spoke frequently about the event, as well as referring to it in his letters, journals, and other prose. In a further link between the Blake vision and Romantic poetry, he often half-jokingly described this need to continually explain his ‘Blake vision’ as a burden similar to that of Coleridge’s *Ancient Mariner*.⁵ As I will explore in more detail later, this idea that he had developed an unhealthy or burdensome attachment to the vision became increasingly significant for Ginsberg, especially from the early 1960s onwards.

Ginsberg’s most detailed and best-known descriptions of his 1948 visions are contained within a lengthy interview he gave for *The Paris Review* in 1965; the interview is also notable for its more general focus on Blake’s poetry.⁶ While Ginsberg does not directly set out to explain or examine what ‘caused’ the visions, he does spend some time exploring various contexts within which the experience occurred, contexts which can be categorized as emotional, sexual, intellectual, spiritual and historical. I want to suggest that these contexts through which Ginsberg attempts to understand the vision (both in the *Paris Review* interview and elsewhere), are as important as the events of the vision itself, which I will explore shortly.

Thus Ginsberg begins his description of the vision in the *Paris Review* interview by emphasizing his emotional fragility in the early summer of 1948, his love affair with

⁴ For Ginsberg’s efforts to recreate his Blake vision using drugs, see for example *Allen Verbatim: Lectures on Poetry, Politics, Consciousness*, ed. by Gordon Ball (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), p. 18, and Paul Portugés, *The Visionary Poetics of Allen Ginsberg* (Santa Barbara: Ross-Erikson, 1978), p. 121. While it is true, as Portugés suggests, that Ginsberg’s early struggle to come to terms with his ‘Blake vision’ was partly a consequence of the fact that there were as yet ‘no sympathetic acid freaks or post-1960 visionaries to whom he could relate his unusual experiences’ (p. 16), it is certainly not the case that ‘in the late forties and during the fifties, psychedelic drugs were not available’ (p. 72). Ginsberg had access to natural peyote in 1952, while (as I explore later in the chapter), Aldous Huxley was able to take synthesized mescaline, the active ingredient of peyote, in 1953.

⁵ See for example *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 35.

⁶ This interview, one of the most important of Ginsberg’s career, was conducted with the poet Tom Clark during Ginsberg’s visit to England in May 1965, and was originally published in the Spring 1966 edition of *The Paris Review*. It is reprinted in *Spontaneous Mind: Selected Interviews 1958-1996*, ed. by David Carter (London: Penguin, 2001), pp. 17-53

Neal Cassady having just come to an end, and how this in turn affected him psychologically and spiritually:

So, in that state therefore, of hopelessness, or dead end, change of phase, you know – growing up – and in an equilibrium in any case, a psychic, a mental equilibrium of a kind, like of having no New Vision and no Supreme Reality and nothing but the world in front of me, and not knowing what to do with that . . . there was a funny balance of tension in every direction.⁷

Ginsberg clearly invites us to see the ‘Blake vision’ as a product of these various contexts, even leaving open the possibility that the visions were entirely self-generated by his mind, in response to his yearning for ‘New Vision’ or ‘Supreme Reality’.

In fact, at various points in his life he would suggest that the Blake vision was really little more than a hallucination. For example, in a letter to Jack Kerouac written a few months after the vision, Ginsberg claimed, ‘The whole vision, it’s just rubbish, just a big fantasy.’⁸ However, Kerouac was inclined to believe that it was this revisionist account which was unreliable, annotating Ginsberg’s letter with the words ‘when he was flipping’.⁹ Meanwhile William Burroughs, while declaring himself a little disappointed with the ‘vague character’ of the visions, assured Ginsberg that a psychiatrist was ‘just throwing around verbiage’ when he diagnosed the visions as ‘hallucinations’, since the meaning of the word ‘hallucination’ had not been defined by the doctor, and in fact had no real meaning.¹⁰ Discussing the nature of the Blake vision yet again at the end of his life, nearly half a century later, Ginsberg himself could only conclude, ‘I cooked it up, somehow!’¹¹

Ginsberg’s open-minded contextualizing of the vision within the *Paris Review* interview, and his focus on the concept of ‘mental equilibrium’, seems intended to suggest that in the summer of 1948 he was simply well prepared to receive and appreciate these consciousness-expanding experiences, whatever their ultimate ‘cause’. However, given the Blakean context of the vision itself, Ginsberg’s emphasis on ‘equilibrium’ also invites us to interpret the situation in which the vision occurred in

⁷ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 36. Ellipsis in original.

⁸ *Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: The Letters*, ed. by Bill Morgan and David Stanford (New York: Penguin, 2011), p. 41.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *The Letters of William S. Burroughs: 1945-1959*, ed. by Oliver Harris (London: Picador, 1993), pp. 44-45.

¹¹ Jack Foley, *O Powerful Western Star* (Oakland: Pantograph, 2000), p. 145.

Blakean terms, as a productive balance of mental ‘contraries’, without which, as Blake wrote in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, there ‘is no progression’ (E34).

Another way in which Ginsberg tried to explain his Blake vision was by situating it within a broader world-historical context, so that in retrospect for Ginsberg 1948 did indeed come to represent the beginning of a new era of consciousness, the period of ‘New Vision’ that he and Kerouac had yearned for. This was an idea put forward by Ginsberg in interviews, lectures and prose, particularly in the early 1970s. Thus, in Ginsberg’s 1972 annotations to Kerouac’s *Visions of Cody*, he writes, ‘I remember these sleepless epiphanies of 1948 – everywhere in America transcendental brain consciousness was waking up’.¹² Similarly, in a 1971 lecture, Ginsberg asserted that ‘history came to an end I think about 1948 or so, and it opened up into some eternal planet place where whatever magic takes place is all going to be of our creation ‘cause we’re the magicians.’¹³

Ginsberg was keen to suggest that evidence for this shift in consciousness that he claimed took place around 1948 could be found not only in his own Blake vision but also in the works and experiences of many other contemporary writers and artists, both from within the Beat movement and beyond it, including poets such as Gary Snyder, Charles Olson, Jack Spicer and Robert Duncan alongside other countercultural figures such as the filmmaker Harry Smith and even Timothy Leary. Together, Ginsberg suggested, such disparate figures amounted to a ‘community that came to total clear consciousness with accompanying explosions of mystical visions and epiphanies around 1948’.¹⁴

In support of this theory, Ginsberg names key poems written by Olson and Duncan in 1948; by linking these to his own visions, Ginsberg implies that for this 1948 ‘community’ of artists, there is no clear dividing line between vision and artistic expression.¹⁵ Through his references to ‘explosions of mystical visions and epiphanies

¹² Allen Ginsberg, *The Visions of the Great Rememberer* (Amherst, MA: Mulch Press, 1974), p. 34.

¹³ *Allen Verbatim*, p. 20.

¹⁴ *Allen Verbatim*, p. 150.

¹⁵ A similar reading of Ginsberg’s Blake vision as a form of shamanic poetry is suggested by Jerome Rothenberg in a 1976 Naropa lecture. See Jerome Rothenberg, ‘Changing the Present, Changing the Past: A New Poetics’, in *Talking Poetics from Naropa Institute, Volume Two*, ed. by Anne Waldman and Marilyn Webb (Boulder and London: Shambhala, 1979), pp. 253-290 (p. 282). Rothenberg’s own interest in Blake is indicated by the Blakean title of one of his anthologies (co-edited with George Quasha): *America a Prophecy: A New Reading of American Poetry from Pre-Columbian Times to the Present* (1973).

around 1948', Ginsberg wants to insist on the reality of a shared visionary experience, broader than his own Blake vision; a similar plural emphasis is found in 'Howl', with its 'Visions! omens! hallucinations! miracles! ecstasies!' In the lecture quoted above, Ginsberg finds further evidence for the communality of vision in 1948 in his depiction of an event experienced by Gary Snyder. According to Ginsberg, this experience occurred just as Snyder was finishing his anthropology thesis: 'that morning when he wrote the last words [...] about primitive consciousness, [...] his head turned inside out, and he suddenly realized "everything is alive" – the entire universe is alive. Every sentient being is alive, like myself. So that was '48, also.'¹⁶

While there is no direct connection between Blake's poetry and Snyder's vision as there had been with Ginsberg's own vision, Snyder's vision clearly parallels Blake's own ecstatic celebrations of the fact that 'every thing that lives is Holy'. This is the final aphoristic line of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, but is also repeated in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (E51), *America a Prophecy* (E54) and *The Four Zoas* (E324), where it is associated with the phrases 'Arise and drink your bliss' (*Visions* and *Four Zoas*), and 'life delights in life' (*America*). Snyder's vision (in Ginsberg's retelling) combines the sentiment of all these phrases. Furthermore, Snyder did in fact share Ginsberg's strong interest in Blake, as did several of the other figures named by Ginsberg as participating in the 'New Vision' of 1948, most notably Robert Duncan.¹⁷ This can be seen as an indication of the fact that Blake's popularity amongst that generation of American writers was not restricted to the core group of Beats themselves, but also of the fact that Ginsberg's passion for Blake was such that he was drawn to seek out those who shared the same interest.

Remarkably, Ginsberg was even able to locate other people who had had their own visions of Blake (though not in the same magic year of 1948). Thus, on his first meeting with Michael McClure in 1954, an instant bond formed between the two poets when Ginsberg learnt that McClure had dreamt as an adolescent that he *was* Blake.¹⁸ Later, during the Sixties proper, McClure would himself form a similarly Blake-inspired

¹⁶ *Allen Verbatim*, p. 150.

¹⁷ Both Snyder and Duncan contributed, with Ginsberg, Diane Di Prima, Michael McClure, James Broughton and others, to the anthology *Sparks of Fire: Blake in a New Age*, ed. by James Bogan and Fred Goss (Richmond, CA: North Atlantic Books, 1982).

¹⁸ See Bill Morgan, *I Celebrate Myself: The Somewhat Private Life of Allen Ginsberg* (New York: Penguin, 2007), p. 206, and Michael McClure, *Scratching the Beat Surface: Essays on New Vision from Blake to Kerouac* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982), pp. 137-9.

‘friendship and brotherhood’ with Jim Morrison, and took Morrison on a ‘poets’ tour’ of London to see the site of one of Blake’s former residences and to view Blake’s works in the Tate Gallery.¹⁹ Meanwhile, eight years after his meeting with McClure, Ginsberg was delighted to discover that even Bertrand Russell, with whom he had been corresponding about the nuclear arms race, claimed to have experienced a Blake-inspired vision of some kind.²⁰ During the Sixties Ginsberg was at the centre of much of the popular interest in Blake, but his discovery that others had independently had similar visionary experiences involving Blake seemed to give credence to his idea that his own 1948 Blake vision had a broader historical significance.

Ginsberg’s urge to retrospectively place his vision in this broader visionary-historical context, so that ‘history came to an end [...] about 1948’, was partly influenced by his knowledge of Hinduism and Buddhism, with their concept of a cyclical progression of ‘kalpas’ or aeons. However even at the time of the Blake vision itself, the core Beat group of Ginsberg, Kerouac and Burroughs were encouraged to place their experiences in a world-historical or even cosmic context by their reading of the German historian Oswald Spengler (1880-1936), whose major work *The Decline of the West* elucidates a theory of the cyclical rise and fall of civilizations. As John Lardas suggests, through Spengler the Beats came to adopt ‘a cosmic view of history and became infused with an apocalyptic sense of urgency.’²¹ At the same time however, it was of course during this same mid-Forties period that Ginsberg also first began to read Blake in depth, leading to the Blake vision itself. The two influences are combined in Ginsberg’s later description of how, at the age of seventeen, he ‘was getting teaching from Burroughs that included Blake and Spengler’.²² Ginsberg’s idea that his vision

¹⁹ Jerry Hopkins and Daniel Sugarman, *No One Here Gets Out Alive: The Biography of Jim Morrison* (New York: Warner, 1995), p. 385. In Chapter Four I briefly discuss Morrison’s relationship with Blake, as well as McClure’s identification of the Blakean influence on Dylan.

²⁰ See *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, pp. 271-4. While Ginsberg closes his letter by expressing the hope that Russell will one day put his ‘experience of Blake on verbal record in more detail’, I have found no further reference to it in any published work by or about Bertrand Russell.

²¹ John Lardas, *The Bop Apocalypse: The Religious Visions of Kerouac, Ginsberg, and Burroughs* (Illinois: Illinois University Press, 2001), p. 11. Lardas’s work (in spite of its misleadingly generalist title) is primarily a fascinating study of Spengler’s deep influence on the Beats.

²² *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 307. It is apparent from several of Ginsberg’s Naropa seminars, including one taught jointly with his father Louis Ginsberg, that growing up with a poet as a father meant that he was exposed to the poetry of Blake and other Romantics from a very young age. However, it seems likely that it was indeed Burroughs who first encouraged him to devote time to the study of Blake. See *The Allen Ginsberg Project* <<http://ginsbergblog.blogspot.co.uk/2012/01/louis-ginsberg-guests-in-allens->

represented part of a broader revolution in consciousness has obvious links to the ideas of Blake himself, for whom the French and American Revolutions were not simply political events, but were also apocalyptic, ‘internal’ revolutions, to be set in the context of an ongoing cycle of history stretching back thousands of years. Such ideas are revealed not only in the broad temporal, geographical and mythical sweep of Blake’s so-called ‘Continental Prophecies’ (*America*, *Europe*, and *The Song of Los*), but also in his later fully-developed Albion myth of *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, which I explore in more detail in the next chapter.²³

Writing in 1994, Ginsberg acknowledged that the urge felt by the Beats to transform the world around them was in fact typical of something felt by young people throughout history, from nineteenth-century bohemia to the then current era of grunge music:

So we began talking about what in 1945 we called a New Consciousness, or a New Vision. As most young people probably do, at the age of fifteen to nineteen, whether it’s punk or bohemia or grunge or whatever new vision adolescents have, there is always some kind of striving for understanding and transformation of the universe, according to one’s own subjective, poetic, generational inspiration.²⁴

While this perspective seems to undermine his earlier exceptionalist claims for the visionary generation of 1948, I want to suggest that Ginsberg’s belief that his own Blake vision held a broader historical significance does indeed have some validity, although mainly in the sense that Ginsberg consciously used his memory of the experience to create the Sixties themselves. It therefore potentially marks another starting point for ‘the long Sixties’, although its originally private visionary aspect makes it very different to other potential starting points for ‘the long Sixties’, which typically have a broader cultural or political significance.²⁵ At the same time however,

[1975.html](#)> and < <http://ginsbergblog.blogspot.co.uk/2012/08/allen-1978-in-stoneybrook-poetry-and.html>> [accessed 16 June 2014].

²³ On the ‘apocalyptic mode’ as an expansion of consciousness in Ginsberg and Blake, see also Tony Trigilio, ‘*Strange Prophecies Anew*’: *Rereading Apocalypse in Blake, H. D., and Ginsberg*.

²⁴ Allen Ginsberg, ‘The Vomit of a Mad Tyger: The Spiritual Autobiography of Allen Ginsberg’, *Shambhala Sun*, 2 (1994)

<<http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=3003>> [accessed 16 May 2014].

²⁵ Thus for example, launching *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture* in 2008, the editors staked a double claim for the year 1954, firstly as the year that the American Supreme Court ‘ended the legal doctrine of “separate but equal,” setting the stage for a new phase of integration struggles’, and

various significant dates for the Beats have also been given; thus Marianne DeKoven suggests as an alternative starting point ‘the late fifties’, as ‘the heyday of the Beat movement’.²⁶ Beginning the ‘long Sixties’ with Ginsberg’s 1948 Blake vision is in some ways a logical extension of this argument.

As far as I am aware, Ginsberg himself never quite explicitly made the claim that his 1948 Blake vision marked the beginning of the Sixties themselves. However, this may have been because for Ginsberg, the links between the Blake vision, the Fifties Beat project, and the subsequent counterculture of the Sixties were self-evident. As I will explore in more detail in the next chapter, Ginsberg bore a particular responsibility for creating a notion of a new Blakean consciousness in the Sixties that was global, or at least transatlantic, in its reach. Furthermore, he was directly responsible for several of the best-known visual markers of the Sixties. He had instigated the phenomenon of ‘flower power’, if not the actual phrase, in a 1965 essay in which he advised the use of ‘[m]asses of flowers’ as ‘a visual spectacle’ on political demonstrations. (Striking and influential notions such as these are a reminder that he had previously worked for an advertising agency.) He even claimed to have been responsible for the widespread adoption of Indian styles of clothing within the counterculture, following his return from India in 1963. By the end of the Sixties, Ginsberg himself had become a visual icon of the counterculture, so that as Jane Kramer noted in 1969, ‘a cheerful living-room poster of Ginsberg, whose name was once synonymous with the word “beat” in all its permutations, became tantamount to a full-blown instant hippie ambiance.’²⁷

Therefore, while there may indeed always be ‘some kind of striving for understanding and transformation of the universe’ amongst groups of young people in every generation, the Beats were unusual in that they did in fact go on to see a version of their ‘New Vision’ become a reality. Reading Kerouac’s *Visions of Cody* in 1972, Ginsberg noted that the ‘peace protester adolescents’ who ‘sit & weep on Capitol Hill Lawn’ were examples of the ‘hundreds of Allens & Neals & Jack Souls mortal lamblake

secondly as the year that French colonial rule ended in Indochina/Vietnam, paving the way for greater US military involvement in the region. Jeremy Varon, Michael S. Foley and John McMillian, ‘Editorial: Time is an ocean: the past and future of the Sixties’, *The Sixties*, 1 (2008), 1-7 (p. 5).

²⁶ Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), p. 3.

²⁷ Kramer, Jane, *Paterfamilias: Allen Ginsberg in America* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1970), p. 11.

sighing over the nation now.’²⁸ The Blakean resonances of this phrase indicate not only the extent of Ginsberg’s almost unconscious reproduction of Blake’s language, but also the way in which, with Ginsberg’s help, the Sixties themselves had become Blakean.

As early as 1954, Kerouac was already able to inform Ginsberg that he had ‘pondered and remembered your 1948 Harlem visions, and they were the granddaddy of em all’.²⁹ In the later full-flowering Sixties, the position of Ginsberg’s Blake vision as the progenitor of a Blakean psychedelic counterculture was even clearer. As Franca Bellarsi writes, ‘[w]hether one chooses to read the “Blake epiphany” as mere psychosis or as genuine spiritual revelation, the clinical assessment of the episode matters in the final analysis less than the artistic use to which Ginsberg put it in his writing.’³⁰ I will examine some of the ways in which Blake’s poetry and the ‘Blake vision’ influenced Ginsberg’s poetry later in this chapter, and in the next chapter. However, modifying Bellarsi’s argument, I also want to suggest that it was not only through Ginsberg’s poetry that the meaning and significance of the Blake vision was formulated, but also through his Ancient Mariner-like repetitions of the story in interviews, lectures and general conversation, so that he drew on this narrative, and on Blake’s poetry itself, to consciously ‘Rouze up’ a younger generation and create the Sixties counterculture in the form of the ‘New Age’ which Blake had predicted in his *Preface* to Milton. Furthermore, as I will explore later in the chapter, during the Sixties Ginsberg actually came to see Blake’s poetry as having a more general ‘psychedelic’ effect on the human consciousness which went beyond the unique circumstances of own Blake vision. However, before exploring the implications of this idea further, I want to return to the events of the Blake vision itself.

Embodied Vision

One aspect of Ginsberg’s Blake vision which has often been overlooked – and which seems particularly significant in the light of Ginsberg’s later effort to move away from a transcendentalist understanding of not only this vision but the visionary more generally – is the physical or sexual aspect of the experience. In the *Paris Review* interview,

²⁸ Ginsberg, *The Visions of the Great Rememberer*, p. 3.

²⁹ Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: *The Letters*, p. 231.

³⁰ Franca Bellarsi, ‘Allen Ginsberg’s Re-Reading of William Blake’s “Spiritual War”’, *University of Bucharest Review*, 8.3 (2006), 42-49 (p. 43).

Ginsberg describes his physical state at the moment that he first heard Blake's voice; he had been lying on his bed, looking through a book of Blake's poems while simultaneously masturbating.³¹

It is worth focusing on this seemingly bizarre detail of the circumstances in which his Blake vision arose. I want to suggest firstly that this linking of masturbation with vision must be seen in terms of Ginsberg's insistence on the interconnectedness of the physical, spiritual, intellectual and sexual realms, as set out for example in 'Footnote to Howl' (1955):

Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy!
 Holy! Holy! Holy! Holy!
 The world is holy! The soul is holy! The skin is holy! The nose is holy! The
 tongue and cock and hand and asshole holy!
 Everything is holy! everybody's holy! everywhere is holy! everyday is in
 eternity! Everyman's an angel!

In the 1986 annotated edition of *Howl*, Ginsberg notes that the phrase 'everyday is an eternity!' was an echo of Blake's 'Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour', from 'Auguries of Innocence' (E490). However, it hardly needs pointing out that the whole passage is intensely Blakean, from the repeated word 'Holy!' – reminiscent of Blake's description of the 'Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying Holy Holy Holy' (E565),³² – to 'Everything is holy!', a near-quotation of 'every thing that lives is Holy'. Furthermore, the focus on the body is comparable to Blake's vision of the 'human form divine', which he returns to throughout his works, from *Songs of Innocence* through to *Milton* and *The Four Zoas*.

It is also noteworthy that Ginsberg narrates this detail in a matter-of-fact fashion, apparently free of embarrassment. This is indicative of Ginsberg's general belief in openness or candour, a philosophy that was an important aspect of the Beat movement and of Sixties counterculture.³³ In terms of Ginsberg's literary influences, this philosophy can be linked particularly to Walt Whitman, especially in so far as Whitman

³¹ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 35.

³² Ginsberg quotes this passage in the *Paris Review* interview (*Spontaneous Mind*, p. 40).

³³ In a 1982 grant application, Ginsberg lists the major achievements of his career, including: 'Introduction of the word "Fuck" into college textbooks as integral literary word in poems. [...] Role model innovation in integrating persona of poet as spiritual meditative aesthetic private personage and public activist "generation leader" democratic citizen, thus expanding possibilities of "public figure" to be frank in public' (*The Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, p. 408).

relates candour to both human physicality and the power of poetry itself. Thus, in the 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman declaims,

Men and women and the earth and all upon it are simply to be taken as they are, and the investigation of their past and present and future shall be unintermitted, and shall be done with perfect candor. [...] The great poets are also to be known by the absence in them of tricks and by the justification of perfect personal candor. Then folks echo a new cheap joy and a divine voice leaping from their brains: How beautiful is candor! All faults may be forgiven of him who has perfect candor.³⁴

However, I want to argue here that this philosophy of candour, as manifested in Ginsberg's *Paris Review* interview and elsewhere, is not only Whitmanian but also Blakean in essence. We can link Blake not only to the general theme of candour, but also more directly to the theme of masturbation itself, the most obvious reference to which occurs in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793).

Although the main narrative of *Visions* revolves around rape, sexual jealousy, and the oppressive restrictions placed on human sexuality by religion, on the penultimate page of the book (plate seven) the central female character Oothoon offers what seems to be an alternative, sexually liberated vision for herself and humanity at large, at the centre of which is her call for 'Love! Love! Love! happy happy Love! free as the mountain wind!' (VDA 7:16, E50). It is not hard to see how such a vision of 'free love' might have appealed to Blake's Sixties readers, and Oothoon concludes this remarkable speech by contrasting her lover Theotormon's obsessive sexual jealousy with her own unselfish vision (or perhaps voyeuristic fantasy) of Theotormon '[i]n lovely copulation bliss on bliss' with other partners, 'girls of mild silver, or of furious gold' whom she suggests she could herself procure or 'catch' for him (7:24-26, E50).

The use of the word 'copulation' here is an echo of Oothoon's description, at the beginning of the passage, of her own eyes 'fix'd / In happy copulation' with beauty itself (6:23-7:1, E50). Immediately following this, she refers to both female and male masturbation:

The moment of desire! the moment of desire! The virgin

³⁴ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (1855), electronic edition at *The Walt Whitman Archive*, ed. by Ed Folsom and Kenneth M. Price <<http://www.whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1855/whole.html>> [accessed 7 June 2014].

That pines for man; shall awaken her womb to enormous joys
 In the secret shadows of her chamber; the youth shut up from
 The lustful joy. shall forget to generate. & create an amorous image
 In the shadows of his curtains and in the folds of his silent pillow.
 (VDA 7:3-7, E50)

In contrast to the ecstatic celebration of ‘happy Love! free as the mountain wind!’ that lies at the centre of the passage – also standing out visually, at the physical centre of Blake’s illuminated page – this image of ‘the youth shut up [...] forget[ting] to generate’ seems to offer a negative view of the act of masturbation. However, the references to ‘joy’, and the overall context in which these lines are placed, suggest that it is not the act itself which is condemned, but the secrecy associated with it. The ‘secret shadows of her chamber’, ‘the shadows of his curtains’, and ‘the folds of his silent pillow’ allow for no openness or candour; they are therefore linked to the oppressive forces of religion and sexual jealousy that Oothoon condemns, rather than to her own vision of sexual candour and ‘happy Love’. Finally, I want to point out that Oothoon’s vision ends with the line Ginsberg borrows in ‘Footnote to Howl’, ‘every thing that lives is holy!’ (VDA 8:10, E51).

The relationship between Blake and sexuality has in recent years received much critical attention, from historicist and other theoretical perspectives. Thus recent book titles have included *Blake and the Body* (2002), *Queer Blake* (2010), *Blake, Sexuality and Bourgeois Politeness* (2011), and most recently the rather wonderfully titled *Sexy Blake* (2013).

In their introduction to *Sexy Blake*, Helen Bruder and Tristanne Connolly note that ‘the real Sexy Blake has always been popular Blake’ as embodied in ‘proud reprobates like Allen Ginsberg, Jim Morrison and Patti Smith.’³⁵ However, this physical or sexual aspect of the connection between Ginsberg and Blake has not in fact yet been examined in any detail, either in *Sexy Blake* or elsewhere.³⁶ Furthermore, the masturbatory detail of Ginsberg’s Blake vision has often been omitted altogether from more general Romanticist scholarship on the subject of Ginsberg and Blake. This says

³⁵ Helen P. Bruder and Tristanne Connolly, ‘Introduction: Bring me my Arrows of desire: Sexy Blake in the Twenty-First Century’, in *Sexy Blake*, ed. by Helen P. Bruder and Tristanne Connolly (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1-20 (p.12).

³⁶ In addition to the sexual aspect of the ‘Blake vision’, any such study would also have to include Ginsberg’s ‘Contest of Bards’ (1977), a long poem written in a self-consciously Blakean prophetic style, which centres around a sexual relationship between an older Bard (who shares features with both Blake and Ginsberg) and his young poet-disciple (also reminiscent of Ginsberg’s younger self).

much about the critical embarrassment that such details can cause, but I also want to suggest that the whole broader topic of Blake's countercultural popularity has until recently been characterized by a level of embarrassment within Blake scholarship. It seems significant that the sudden rush of books in the last decade or so exploring various aspects of Blakean sexuality has happened alongside a similar explosion of interest over the same period in the general topic of Blake's reception, and that some of the same scholars have been involved in both trends, including Tristanne Connolly, who as well as editing and contributing to several of the books mentioned above, has also written a number of incisive articles on the links between Blake and Jim Morrison, which I refer to briefly in Chapter Four.

One further recent text on Blake and sexuality is *Why Mrs Blake Cried: William Blake and the Sexual Basis of Spiritual Vision* (2006), in which Marsha Keith Schuchard provides fascinating evidence that Blake may have absorbed a considerable amount of Kabbalistic and even Indian Tantric sexual doctrine via his Swedenborgian and Moravian connections.³⁷ Some of the specific details of Schuchard's book allow us to make surprisingly direct connections between the sexual aspect of Ginsberg's Blake vision, and Blake's own vision of the appearance of *his* primary prophetic influence, John Milton.³⁸ Like Ginsberg's vision, Blake's vision involves a seemingly bizarre physical detail, which with Schuchard's help we can see as potentially having a sexual significance equivalent to Ginsberg's masturbatory vision of Blake. In *Milton*, the spirit of Milton descends into Blake's body through his left foot: 'Miltons shadow fell [...] / And on my left foot falling on the tarsus, enterd there' (M 15:45-49, E110). This event is also visually depicted in a full-page design (the frontispiece to Book Two of *Milton*) which shows Milton's spirit in the form of a star descending towards the outstretched foot of the naked Blake (see Figure 6 below). In Schuchard's book, she argues that there is an esoteric sexual significance to these details of Blake's vision, involving the

³⁷ Marsha Keith Schuchard, *Why Mrs Blake Cried: William Blake and the Sexual Basis of Spiritual Vision* (London: Century, 2006).

³⁸ Schuchard does not herself make any links to Blake's later reception, or comment on the way in which her discoveries seem to justify the syncretic Sixties approach to Blake, which has sometimes been criticized for implicitly linking him to precisely the kind of esoteric Eastern (and Western) traditions that she explicitly links him to. Rather oddly, given the obvious overlap between Schuchard's scholarly interests and certain esoteric aspects of the counterculture, Schuchard seems to have fought in the post-Sixties 'culture wars' on the *anti*-Sixties side. In her role as founder of Parents' Research Institute for Drug Education (PRIDE), she helped instigate and promote Ronald Reagan's 'War on Drugs' during the 1980s (see Arthur Benavie, *Drugs: America's Holy War* [New York: Routledge, 2009], pp. 31-32).

association between the foot and the phallus in various traditions.³⁹ Whether or not Blake was drawing on the particular Kabbalistic-Tantric traditions that Schuchard suggests he was, the image he drew of himself receiving Milton into his body seems charged with ecstatic sexual energy.⁴⁰

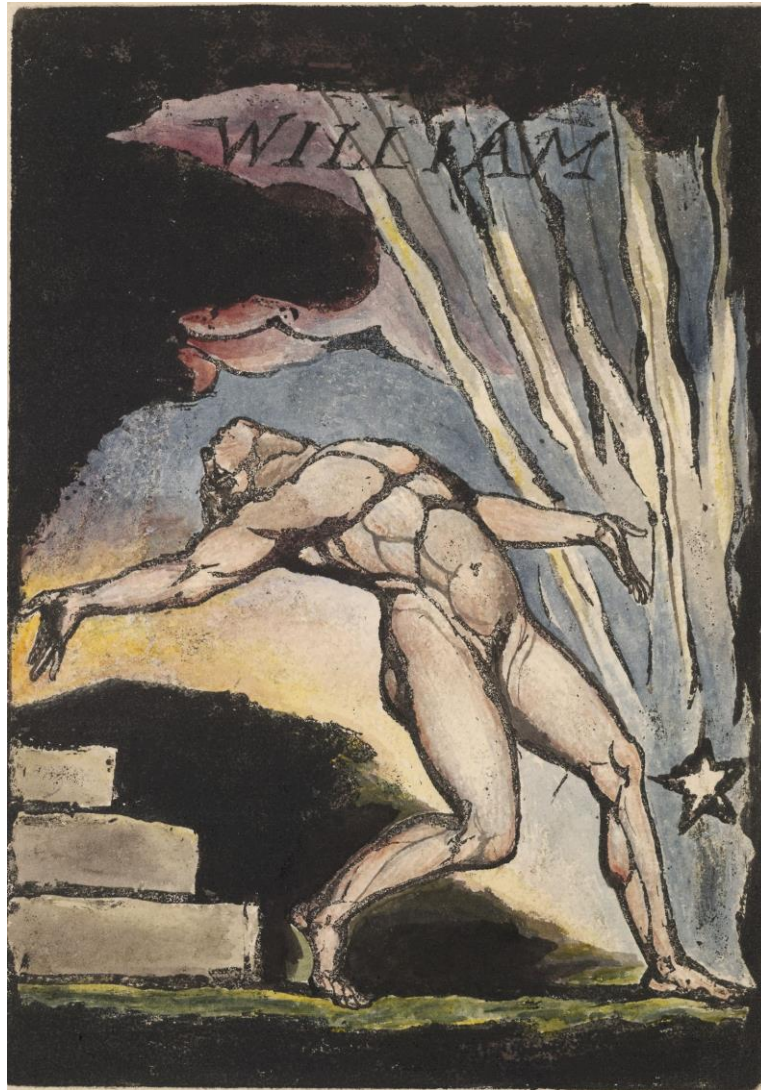


Figure 6. Frontispiece to Book Two of Blake's *Milton* (Copy A), showing the spirit of Milton, in the form of a star, entering the left foot of the naked Blake. © Trustees of the British Museum.

³⁹ Schuchard, pp. 302-308.

⁴⁰ Schuchard's fascinating ideas seem at least plausible, although I am not entirely convinced by her suggestion that the image from *Milton* shows Blake with an 'erect, blackened or charred penis' (Schuchard, p. 302). More generally however, as Schuchard also notes, the fact that of the four known copies of *Milton*, only the first (copy A) portrays Blake entirely nude, while the other three have underpants painted on (albeit rather translucent ones), bears testament to the provocative eroticism of the original design. All four versions can be compared at the *Blake Archive*; see <<http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/work.xq?workid=milton&java=no>> [accessed 16 June 2014].

Even without the help of Schuchard's intriguing historical evidence about Blake's 'sexual path to spiritual vision', the details of which Ginsberg himself can have had no direct knowledge of, we can see that the sexual element of Ginsberg's Blake vision is important. Furthermore, as I will suggest later in the chapter, Ginsberg's description of the masturbatory detail in his *Paris Review* interview (which took place seventeen years after the Blake vision itself) can be linked to Ginsberg's changing perspective in the Sixties towards the visionary (and the Blake vision in particular), a change which was based on an abandonment of transcendentalism and a renewed emphasis on the significance of the body itself.

In terms of the actual events of the Blake vision, Ginsberg describes how it began with a sudden epiphany, in which he understood Blake's poetry to be addressed to him personally at that moment. Simultaneously, he 'heard a very deep earthen grave voice in the room', which he knew to be 'Blake's voice'.⁴¹ The voice also seemed to him to be '[l]ike the voice of the Ancient of Days'⁴² and 'like God had a human voice'.⁴³ Interestingly, at this point in the interview Ginsberg refers to the voice both as 'the auditory hallucination' and 'the apparitional voice', indicating a continued uncertainty as to whether the experience was generated within his mind or externally. However, Ginsberg's strong inclination is to understand the whole experience, which also had a powerful visual element ('through the window . . . it seemed that I saw into the depths of the universe'), as his 'initiation', 'the moment that I was born for', 'a sudden awakening into a totally deeper real universe than I'd been existing in.' In the midst of these events, Ginsberg vowed to 'never forget, never renege, never deny' the experience:

⁴¹ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 36.

⁴² As Terence Diggory notes, the positive connotations of the 'Ancient of Days' here suggest that Ginsberg has in mind the original Biblical figure referred to in the Book of Daniel (7: 9-22), rather than the figure Blake depicts in the frontispiece to *Europe: A Prophecy* (1794), who is a version of the oppressive Urizen. See Diggory, 'Allen Ginsberg's Urban Pastoral,' in *The Beat Generation: Critical Essays*, ed. by Kostas Myrsiades (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), p. 216. Later, under the influence of Buddhism, Ginsberg would in any case revise this initial theistic understanding of his vision. See Allen Ginsberg, 'The Vomit of a Mad Tyger: The Spiritual Autobiography of Allen Ginsberg', *Shambhala Sun*, 2 (1994) <<http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=3003>> [accessed 16 May 2014].

⁴³ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 37.

Never deny the voice – no, never *forget* it, don't get lost mentally wandering in other spirit worlds or American or job worlds or advertising worlds or war worlds or earth worlds.⁴⁴

Ginsberg's words here provide a significant suggestion of the forces he considers to be in opposition to his Blakean experience. Some of these, such as the 'job worlds', 'advertising worlds' and 'war worlds', could be seen as constituting the 'straight' world to which an alternative was provided by the Sixties counterculture, which at the time of the vision had not yet arrived, but which at the time of Ginsberg's interview he was at the centre of. It is also significant that for Ginsberg the visionary Blakean experience, which might be considered a hallucination by those trapped within the 'job worlds' or 'war worlds', constitutes just the opposite: 'a totally deeper real universe than I'd been existing in.'⁴⁵

Ginsberg's belief that the visionary universe is 'real' puts him in the company of Blake himself, who stated that 'This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination'.⁴⁶ However, it is important to note that Ginsberg's description of his entry into 'a totally deeper real universe' – separate from and more 'real' than the everyday 'earth worlds' – actually puts his vision into Platonic, dualistic terms which do not necessarily correspond with Blake's worldview, which is essentially non-dualistic and based on a theory of complementary 'contraries' rather than oppositional 'negations'.⁴⁷ As Los asserts in Blake's *Jerusalem*, 'Negations are not Contraries: Contraries mutually Exist: / But Negations Exist Not' (E162).

Ginsberg's own approach to the visionary also changed significantly during the 1960s, largely under the influence of the non-theistic, non-dualist religion of Buddhism. Ginsberg's rejection of a transcendent understanding of visionary experience in general (and of his Blake visions in particular) is usually seen as beginning with his poem *The Change*, which was written in 1963, thus pre-dating his *Paris Review* interview by two years. However, there are two important points to make here. Firstly, we should

⁴⁴ Ibid. Italics in original.

⁴⁵ As I have already noted, sometimes Ginsberg himself also seems to view his 'Blake vision' from the more normative perspective of the American society that surrounds him. Earlier in the interview he uses the term 'auditory hallucination' to describe his experience, which seems to contradict his assertion here that it represented an 'awakening into a totally deeper real universe'.

⁴⁶ 'Letter to Dr Trusler' (August 23, 1799), E702.

⁴⁷ While most Blake scholars agree with this assessment of Blake's non-dualism, we should also note the view represented in particular by Kathleen Raine, whose whole scholarly career was based on the theory that Blake represents part of a continuing 'hidden tradition' of Neo-Platonism.

remember that while the interview took place in 1965, Ginsberg is describing an experience that took place in 1948. Secondly, as I will suggest in the next chapter, Ginsberg's approach to visionary experience did not remain constant in his poetry of the 1960s, but in fact varied considerably.

The initial ecstatic vision, as described by Ginsberg in the *Paris Review* interview and several later renditions of the same narrative, was brought on by reading a specific Blake poem, 'Ah! Sun-flower' from *Songs of Experience*, and in a sense the vision *was* a reading of that poem. It involved a sudden understanding of the poem's combination of particularity and universality, so that Ginsberg felt an intense self-identification with both the 'Sun-flower' itself, 'Seeking after that sweet golden clime', and the 'Youth' who 'pined away with desire', at the same time as realizing that the poem 'expressed some kind of universal longing for union with some infinite nature'.⁴⁸

This first ecstatic vision was followed the same day by two further experiences, brought on by reading two more poems from *Songs of Experience*, 'The Little Girl Lost' and 'The Sick Rose'. As with 'Ah! Sun-flower', Ginsberg again experienced an intense sense of self-identification with the central character of 'The Little Girl Lost', while also interpreting the poem in universal terms:

I suddenly realized that Lyca was me, or Lyca was the self; father, mother seeking Lyca, was God seeking, Father, the Creator; and 'If her heart does ache / Then let Lyca wake' – wake to what? *Wake* to the same awareness I was just talking about – of existence in the entire universe. The total consciousness then, of the complete universe.⁴⁹

A similar pattern of personal identification and universal interpretation applied to Ginsberg's reading (or as he experienced it, Blake's reading) of 'The Sick Rose'; however, as might be expected, Ginsberg's feeling was no longer ecstatic, but reflected the mood of this dark poem:

[T]he sick rose is my self, or self, or the living body, sick because [of] the mind, which is the worm 'That flies in the night, In the howling storm' [...]. But anyway, I experienced 'The Sick Rose,' with the voice of Blake reading it, as something that applied to the whole universe, like hearing the doom of the whole universe, and at the same time the inevitable beauty of doom. [...]

⁴⁸ Allen Ginsberg, 'The Vomit of a Mad Tyger', n.p.

⁴⁹ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 39.

But a little of it slightly scary, having to do with the knowledge of death – my death and also the death of being itself, and that was the great pain.⁵⁰

In the next two visionary experiences, which Ginsberg remembers taking place on separate days the following week, the feeling of dark sublime which had accompanied his reading of 'The Sick Rose' was transformed firstly into a feeling of the ridiculousness of existence, and finally into an experience of full-blown terror.

Once again, these experiences were either catalyzed by reading Blake, or explicitly brought to mind particular poems by Blake. In the book shop of Columbia University, where Ginsberg was studying, he was once again 'leafing over a book of Blake', when he came across 'The Human Abstract', in which Blake explains how the Tree of Mystery, representing the evils of organized religion and bearing 'the fruit of Deceit', is not externally imposed but rather grows 'in the Human Brain'. Ginsberg suddenly found himself 'in the eternal place *once more*', but this time he was struck by the ridiculous absurdity of the universe, and it seemed to him that everyone around him was wearing 'horrible grotesque masks, grotesque because *hiding* the knowledge from each other.'⁵¹ He thought of Blake's 'London', feeling that the faces of the people around him bore the 'Marks of weakness, marks of woe' that Blake describes, and that his own purpose must be to 'break down everybody's masks and roles sufficiently so that everybody has to face the universe *and* the possibility of the sick rose coming true and the atom bomb.'⁵²

A final vision occurred days later, again on the campus of Columbia University; 'it was the same depth of consciousness or the same cosmical awareness but suddenly it was not blissful at all but it was *frightening*.'⁵³ He felt that Blake was urging him 'To find the western path / Right thro the gates of Wrath' ('Morning', E478), but he was 'too cowardly to pursue it.'⁵⁴

⁵⁰ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 38.

⁵¹ *Spontaneous Mind*, pp. 41-42 (italics in original).

⁵² *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 43.

⁵³ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 44 (italics in original).

⁵⁴ Ibid. In 'The Vomit of a Mad Tyger', Ginsberg suggests that this experience was also catalyzed by 'The Sick Rose'.

Interpreting the Blake vision

I have already made the suggestion that Ginsberg's Blake vision can be linked to Blake's vision of Milton. After Ginsberg's fame this would become something of a critical commonplace, and the link was also implicitly made by Ginsberg himself,⁵⁵ as well as by his friends. Thus Patti Smith remembers that when Ginsberg lay dying of cancer in 1997, she was among those who kept a vigil by his bedside:

I wandered into his library and randomly chose a book, a volume of Blake in blood-red binding. Each poem was deeply annotated in Allen's hand, just as Blake had annotated Milton. I could imagine those prolific, complex men discoursing; the angels, mute, admiring.⁵⁶

Even at the time of the visions themselves, Ginsberg was keen to contextualize them in terms of other historical accounts of visionary experiences, and was conscious of being part of a visionary tradition that extended back further than Blake himself. Although he had been reading Blake immediately prior to his first vision, he had also for some time been immersing himself in other mystical literature, including St. John of the Cross, St. Theresa of Avila, Plato and Plotinus, as well as the accounts in William James's *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. It is significant that Ginsberg was sub-letting the Harlem apartment in which his visions took place from a theology student, whose books it was that Ginsberg was reading. As Paul Portugés puts it, Ginsberg's 1948 visions were therefore 'not entirely a matter of chance'; rather, he had been 'preparing' himself for some time.⁵⁷

That Ginsberg was very conscious of his place in this visionary tradition is also apparent from the fact that one of his first actions following his initial Blake visions was to re-read these theology books:

I remember I immediately rushed to Plato and read some great image in the *Phaedrus* about horses flying through the sky, and rushed over to Saint John and started reading fragments of *con un no saber sabiendo . . . que me quedé balbuciendo*, and rushed to the other part of the bookshelf and picked up Plotinus about The Alone[.]⁵⁸

⁵⁵ See for example *Allen Verbatim*, p. 110.

⁵⁶ Patti Smith, 'Introduction' to William Blake, *Poems* (London: Vintage, 2007), p. xii.

⁵⁷ Portugés, *The Visionary Poetics of Allen Ginsberg*, pp. 100-101.

⁵⁸ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 40. Ginsberg refers to Plato's so-called 'Chariot Allegory' (sections 246a-254e of the *Phaedrus*), in which the human soul is compared to a charioteer controlling two winged horses pulling in opposite directions. The lines Ginsberg quotes from St. John of the Cross are from the poem

The links that Ginsberg makes here to other, non-Blakean visionary texts bring us to an important aspect of the 1948 Blake vision which has received little, if any, critical attention thus far. A great deal has been written about Ginsberg's early Sixties shift in perspective on the Blake vision (and on the visionary mode more generally), commemorated and encoded in Ginsberg's poem 'The Change' (1963), and also his later realization that 'the voice of Blake, the ancient saturnal voice, is the voice I have now. I was imagining my own body consciousness'.⁵⁹ However, it is equally significant that his early accounts of his Blake vision are very different from the 1965 *Paris Review* interview, which I have been using as the basis for my discussion thus far, and which has been almost universally taken as Ginsberg's definitive account of the 1948 events. The primary difference between this account and those in earlier letters and journal entries is the greater emphasis that Ginsberg places on the Blakean aspect of the vision in his later account.

Rather surprisingly, there is no contemporaneous account of the Blake vision at all in Ginsberg's journals from the summer of 1948. There is even some confusion about which month the visions took place; the editors of Ginsberg's *First Journals and Poems*, Bill Morgan and Juanita Lieberman-Plimpton, claim that it was July,⁶⁰ but other evidence suggests that they occurred in May, the month Ginsberg moved into the sublet Harlem apartment where some of the visions took place. This earlier date seems to be confirmed by a letter to Neal Cassady, dated May 1948, in which Ginsberg writes, 'The light broke for me several times in the past weeks, partly owing to your letter.'⁶¹ The letter as published contains a note added in 1977 by Ginsberg himself, which confirms that this line '[r]efers to a vision of Wm. Blake,'⁶² but the letter itself contains no explicit Blakean reference. Similarly, Ginsberg mentions the vision in several letters to Jack Kerouac written in late 1948 and early 1949, including two which quote Blake's

known as 'Verses Written on an Ecstasy' and are translated by Lynda Nicholson as 'By a knowledge that unknowns ... I was left there stammering'. See Gerald Brenan, *St John of the Cross: His Life and Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 178-181.

⁵⁹ *Allen Verbatim*, p. 21.

⁶⁰ Allen Ginsberg, *The Book of Martyrdom and Artifice: First Journals and Poems, 1937-1952*, ed. by Juanita Lieberman-Plimpton and Bill Morgan (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2006), p. 255.

⁶¹ Barry Gifford, ed., *As Ever: The Collected Correspondence of Allen Ginsberg and Neal Cassady* (Berkeley: Creative Arts, 1977), p. 37.

⁶² *Ibid.*

‘Morning’ (‘To find the western path / Right thro the gates of Wrath’),⁶³ but this is used as a general comment on the extremes of emotion that Ginsberg is feeling, and there is no explicit linking of Blake’s poetry to the immediate circumstances of the vision itself in these early letters. The first such reference that I have found occurs a full year after the vision, when in a letter of June 1949 (also to Kerouac) Ginsberg complains of the difficulty of Blake’s ‘weird beautiful prophetic books’, with their ‘crazy symbols of his own which nobody understands’; in contrast, he claims ‘I get not only understanding but the actual illumination of wisdom from the short “Ah, sunflower.”’⁶⁴

The earliest reference to the Blake vision in Ginsberg’s journals (as opposed to letters) occurs in a long entry from April 1949, entitled ‘Portrait of Huncke’. Written in clear, autobiographical prose, the entry recounts various episodes from his friendship with Herbert Huncke, the junkie, petty criminal and Beat muse, including Huncke’s theft of the theology books that Ginsberg was reading at the time of his Blake vision.⁶⁵ In the midst of this ‘portrait’, Ginsberg recounts the vision itself. Parts of this account, including a number of specific phrases, are very similar to the much better-known account that Ginsberg gave sixteen years later in the *Paris Review* interview. However, there are also very significant differences. In the early journal entry (which, we should remember, is nevertheless written nearly a year after the experience itself), Ginsberg never mentions actually hearing Blake’s voice, nor the detail of masturbating before hearing it. Furthermore, in the journal entry, Ginsberg suggests that the first vision was that of the people with faces like masks, that this occurred in the street rather than the bookshop, and that it was not triggered by a reading of Blake, but rather that it occurred spontaneously and inspired him to return to his apartment and read Blake’s account in ‘London’ of the faces with ‘Marks of weakness, marks of woe’. This led him to also read ‘Ah! Sun-flower’ and ‘The Sick Rose’, which caused a return of the visionary sensation he had already experienced on the street.

The differences between the accounts could have several explanations. Firstly, we should note that despite being contained within the pages of a journal, and remaining unpublished until very recently, the ‘Portrait of Huncke’ is written in a self-consciously literary style which indicates that the twenty-two year old Ginsberg may have written it

⁶³ Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: *The Letters*, pp. 49, 59.

⁶⁴ Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: *The Letters*, p. 89.

⁶⁵ Ginsberg, *The Book of Martyrdom and Artifice*, pp. 262-275.

with publication in mind. This could explain the absence of reference to masturbation, and furthermore the style of writing suggests that Ginsberg may have felt justified in taking a more novelistic approach to his material. However, the fact remains that it seems to have only been much later, around the time of Ginsberg's first taste of fame in the mid-1950s, that he began referring to the vision as the 'Blake vision', and it was only in 1965, at the height of his fame not only as a poet but as an activist and icon of the Sixties counterculture, that Ginsberg gave his now definitive *Paris Review* account of the vision, which had at its centre the claim that the vision had been originally *caused* by the reading of Blake's poetry, and that this had occurred while masturbating. I will suggest shortly that Ginsberg's materialistic explanation for the causes of the Blake vision, and the wider claims he makes in the 1960s and 1970s about the psychoactive properties of Blake's poetry more generally, can be linked to his re-embrace of the body and avowed renouncement of the transcendent that occurred in 1963 with his writing of 'The Change'. Ironically, in the *Paris Review* interview itself, Ginsberg claimed that the profound shift in thinking that occurred in 1963 meant that he had 'renounced visions – renounced *Blake!*'.⁶⁶ As I demonstrate throughout this study, Ginsberg did not 'renounce' Blake, but instead continued to place Blake at the centre of his poetry and now also at the centre of the Sixties counterculture that he had helped create. However, Blake *was* intimately involved in the profound shift that Ginsberg attempted to make (not always straightforwardly, as I will suggest in the next chapter), away from a transcendent, dualistic understanding of vision, and towards an embodied unitive vision.

The Blake vision in Ginsberg's early poetry

While the *causal* relationship between Blake's poetry and Ginsberg's visions only becomes fully embedded in Ginsberg's narrative in the 1960s, more general links between the visions and Blake are made in Ginsberg's earlier poetry, beginning with the poems written immediately after the 1948 visions themselves.

I have already made brief reference to the presence of Blake (and the Blake vision) in Ginsberg's most famous poem, 'Howl', and in the next chapter I will examine the Blakean influence on a selection of Ginsberg's poems written between 1958 and 1979, including 'Kral Majales' (1965), where Ginsberg proudly and unambiguously

⁶⁶ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 49.

states that ‘I heard the voice of Blake in a vision, / and repeat that voice.’ However, I want to concentrate here on the lesser-known early poems, written in the weeks and months immediately after the Blake vision, which are very different in style, and which avoid such seemingly straightforward narrative claims about the actual circumstances of the vision, but which are nonetheless intensely and obviously Blakean, and deeply (indeed exclusively) concerned with the nature of the vision itself. These early poems, which remained unpublished until 1972 when they were collected in *The Gates of Wrath* – a volume whose title once again quotes Blake’s ‘Morning’ – are rhymed, lyric poems with strong formal similarities with Blake’s own short lyric works, just as several of Ginsberg’s later poems, from ‘Howl’ onwards, are influenced by the long-lined style of Blake’s prophetic books.⁶⁷

In the same June 1949 letter to Kerouac in which he speaks of receiving ‘the actual illumination of wisdom from the short “Ah, sunflower”’, Ginsberg refers to his ambition of ‘writing about the boys and girls in love in dreamland, like Blake, about the pale youths and white virgins rising from their graves in aspiration for “where my sunflower wishes to go”’.⁶⁸ However, poems such as ‘On Reading William Blake’s “The Sick Rose”’, ‘The Eye Altering Alters All’ and ‘Vision 1948’, all written in the immediate aftermath of the vision itself in 1948, convey a mood of dark, inwardly-turned intensity, as they ask a series of oblique questions about the meaning of the visions Ginsberg had just experienced. Thus in ‘On Reading William Blake’s “The Sick Rose”’, Ginsberg addresses the rose itself:

Rose of spirit, rose of light,
Flower whereof all will tell,
Is this black vision of my sight
The fashion of a prideful spell,
Mystic charm or magic bright,
O Judgement of fire and of fright?

What everlasting force confounded
In its being, like some human
Spirit shrunken in a bounded
Immortality, what Blossom

⁶⁷ Allen Ginsberg, *The Gates of Wrath: Rhymed Poems, 1948-1952* (Bollinas, CA: Grey Fox Press, 1972). In Chapter Four, I will briefly discuss this volume once again, this time in the context of the relationship between Ginsberg, Blake and Bob Dylan.

⁶⁸ Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: *The Letters*, p. 90.

Gathers us inward, astounded?
Is this the sickness that is Doom?

As Paul Portugés notes, this style could be characterized as metaphysical in the literary sense, ‘full of conceits and poetic diction [...] in the style of the sixteenth and seventeenth century mystics and sonneteers’.⁶⁹ However, given the subject matter of the poems, the Blakean poetic influence seems more significant; it is not only the condensed, rhymed style which is reminiscent of Blake’s *Songs*, but also the language itself, apparent for example in phrases such as ‘a bounded / Immortality’. Furthermore, the poem’s series of questions about the nature and intent of the ‘everlasting force’ echoes Blake’s use of the same format, for the same purpose, in ‘The Tyger’.

This early poetry is also of course metaphysical in a philosophical sense, and thus concerned with the possibilities of transcendence. In particular, ‘On Reading William Blake’s “The Sick Rose”’ retains a dualistic understanding of the relationship between the body and the ‘human / Spirit’ or ‘vision of my sight’. However, by the time of his 1965 *Paris Review* interview, Ginsberg was already trying to move beyond such dualism. Through his continued reading of Blake’s own poetry, he was also recognizing the differences between this approach and Blake’s, although in his 1965 account he also makes some effort to convey how he had understood the vision at the time of its actual occurrence.

There is a clear contrast between the tone of his contemporary poetic account of the Blake vision, with its references to ‘Judgement of fire’, ‘black vision’, and ‘spirit shrunk’, and the more positive perspective of the 1965 *Paris Review* interview, where Ginsberg looks back on the events of 1948 from the somewhat more elevated and secure vantage point of the successful poet and public figure he had become in the Sixties. Of course, the interview also took place during a period in which, with Ginsberg’s help, the very concept of a temporary alteration of consciousness had gained more positive associations than it had in the late 1940s. But in these earliest poetic responses to the visions, it is the confused, lonely young man who comes to the fore. To be on the vanguard of a movement can be an exciting position, but also a very lonely one, and Ginsberg’s early responses to his ‘Blake vision’ stress the latter position.

⁶⁹ *The Visionary Poetics of Allen Ginsberg*, pp. 26-27.

While Ginsberg makes it clear in the *Paris Review* interview that the middle part of his Blake vision, brought on by his reading of ‘The Sick Rose’, was ‘slightly scary, having to do with the knowledge of death – my death and also the death of being itself’, he also describes this part of the experience as ‘very beautiful and very awesome’.⁷⁰ However, in the poem just quoted, there is little sense of this beauty, and also no attempt to make a link with the more ecstatic feelings he had apparently experienced earlier the same day, while reading Blake’s ‘Ah! Sun-flower’ and ‘The Little Girl Lost’.

It is also significant that while in ‘Kral Majales’ – written just a week or so before the *Paris Review* interview in May 1965 – Ginsberg could proudly and directly proclaim ‘I heard the voice of Blake in a vision, / and repeat that voice’, in ‘On Reading William Blake’s “The Sick Rose”’ no real attempt is made to explain the poem’s actual visionary origins, despite the title. The same is true of Ginsberg’s ‘The Eye Altering Alters All’; the title, taken from Blake’s ‘The Mental Traveller’, was one of Ginsberg’s favourite Blakean aphorisms, but is the only clue as to the poem’s visionary origin. Once again, in this short poem Ginsberg is concerned not with the ecstatic aspect of the vision itself, but with the baffling questions which surround it:

Many seek and never see,
 anyone can tell them why.
 O they weep and O they cry
 and never take until they try
 unless they try it in their sleep
 and never some until they die.
 I ask many, they ask me.
 This is a great mystery.

Unless we know the origins of the poem, the nature of the ‘great mystery’ remains for the reader doubly mysterious. However, the questions being asked in the poem seem to concern not only the meaning of Ginsberg’s visions, but why such visions are not available to all those who seek them, and why communication of such visions remains so difficult. As I will explore further in the next chapter, the problems and possibilities for the communication of vision through poetry remained at the heart of Ginsberg’s poetic project, even (or especially) after the supposed abandonment of attachment to the Blake vision in the early 1960s.

⁷⁰ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 38.

‘Vision 1948’, another poem written shortly after the vision itself, is almost wholly concerned with the problems of communicating such experiences, and the poet’s anguished sense of the distance between the everyday world and the visionary one. Ginsberg begins by pleading with the ‘Dread spirit in me that I ever try / With written words to move, / Hear thou my plea, at last reply / To my impotent pen’, while in the final stanza he comes close to communicating some sense of the visionary consciousness, but also emphasizes the ‘intolerable’ nature of that experience:

I shudder with intelligence and I
 Wake in the deep light
 And hear a vast machinery
 Descending without sound,
 Intolerable to me, too bright,
 And shaken in the sight
 The eye goes blind before the world goes round.

The final line seems to be an attempt to relate something of the power of his Blake vision, which was blinding as much as it was enlightening. However, the line is also significant for the fact that it sounds very much like it could be an aphorism taken directly from Blake, although it is in fact the work of Ginsberg alone.

Ginsberg later acknowledged that he had indeed made a quite deliberate effort to copy Blake’s technique in these early poems, but also acknowledged the limitations of such a technique:

Having had a visionary experience out of these little poems, Blake’s, my initial reaction to getting turned on, mentally, poetically, spiritually, was to create little mysterious verses similar [...]. I thought I was making a sort of mystical riddle as to the nature of consciousness, but actually, the whole – there’s no content in it.⁷¹

However, the riddling line ‘The eye goes blind before the world goes round’, is not simply Blakean in a general sense, but also shows the more specific influence of the line ‘the Eye altering alters all’, the key line from Blake’s ‘The Mental Traveller’. Although the meaning of Blake’s line is clearer, both lines seem to be concerned with ‘the nature of consciousness’, and the relationship between vision (in both the ordinary and metaphysical sense) and the physical universe.

⁷¹ Allen Ginsberg, ‘Visions of Ordinary Mind: 1948-1955’, in *Talking Poetics*, pp. 381-414 (p. 383).

In a 1976 lecture, Ginsberg commented, 'The Eye altering, alters all – Ah! [...] anybody who's dropped acid knows that, and anybody who's had some kind of ecstatic visionary experience knows that.'⁷² While Ginsberg had not yet experienced psychedelic drugs in 1948 when he had his 'Blake vision', the vision seems to have had all the features of a classic psychedelic trip, and furthermore Ginsberg would go on to use psychedelics as a tool to attempt to regain access to the original insights of the Blake vision itself. The psychedelic nature of the Blake vision is also apparent from Ginsberg's description quoted above, of 'getting turned on, mentally, poetically, spiritually'. However, as I have already suggested, there was also a physical or sexual 'turning on' involved in the Blake vision, which Ginsberg was trying to communicate through these early poems. In 'Vision 1948' the masturbatory, orgasmic origins of the vision seem to be hinted at in lines such as 'at last reply / To my impotent pen' and 'I shudder with intelligence and I / Wake'. Evidence to back up this suggestion can be found in the same 1949 letter to Kerouac in which Ginsberg describes his intention of 'writing about boys and girls in love in dreamland, like Blake'. There, he describes his current symbolic method for writing poetry in sexual terms. Referring to his recently composed poem 'The Shrouded Stranger', he explains that 'the key, has been to remind them (people) that the shroudy stranger has a hard on; and that the key to eternal life is through the keyhole; and so I make great big sensual hints; and not dirty jokes, mind you, but serious hidden invocations.'⁷³ The intended effect of this is 'an outright sensual communion' with the reader, who 'will really be made love to.'⁷⁴

Thus, in Ginsberg's early poems, he attempted to use a Blakean lyric form, in combination with a defined set of poetic symbols, to communicate something of his 1948 visionary experience to his reader, as well as to achieve 'sensual communion' with them. This was also how he initially seemed to believe his 1948 'Blake vision' to have functioned, although as I have shown, only some of the visions had in fact been preceded by the reading of Blake; if his journal account is to be believed, the very first vision may in fact have occurred more spontaneously, triggering him to read Blake,

⁷² 'Spontaneous Poetics - 125 (Blake - The Mental Traveller)', lecture transcript, *The Allen Ginsberg Project* <<http://ginsbergblog.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/spontaneous-poetics-125-blake-mental.html>> [accessed 6 May 2014].

⁷³ Jack Kerouac and Allen Ginsberg: *The Letters*, p. 89.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

rather than vice versa. In 1976, looking back on these early poems, he explained his former method once again:

I thought of poetry then as hermetic, containing some kind of mystical secret of consciousness, which would be referred to by symbols. If you talked about 'bones', if you talked about 'light', that would turn people on to the area of consciousness you were talking about; it might even catalyze that consciousness in them. By 'that consciousness' I mean some kind of big open mystical consciousness, like on acid. (I hadn't had acid at the time.)⁷⁵

There are a number of points I want to draw attention to here. Firstly, it is notable that this amounts to a theory not just for the writing of poetry, but also for reading it. There are therefore similarities to be found with the school of Blakean 'systematizers', whose focus – as discussed in the previous chapter – is primarily on assigning a meaning to Blake's symbols, and whose reading of Blake is governed by the assumption that once the keys to Blake's mythological system are defined and understood, then a stable overall meaning for his texts can be discovered, regardless of the changing circumstances of their reception, and also largely separate from the historical circumstances of their production. This is significant because while Ginsberg's early 'hermetic' theory of poetry can be applied to the reading or writing of any poem, it is also inextricably linked with his attempt to understand the causes and significance of his Blake vision.

The second important point relating to this theory is that it involves a mystical or transcendentalist understanding of the Blake vision (and perhaps of poetry more generally), but that this is combined with a certain amount of materialism. Thus certain words or ideas are expected to have certain definite effects on the mind, as Ginsberg seems so have believed drugs did. The third point I want to make, which I will expand upon shortly, is that Ginsberg did not retain this theory of poetry, in part because he eventually abandoned a mystical or transcendental understanding of the operations of consciousness and the universe as a whole, in favour of a non-dualist understanding founded on Buddhism. However, as I will suggest in the final section of this chapter, during the 1960s Ginsberg developed a new theory of the operation of poetry on the mind which still had at its centre his Blake vision and the poetry of William Blake. Furthermore, this later version of the theory involved a more obvious attempt to

⁷⁵ *Talking Poetics*, p. 383.

combine the visionary with the material world, and most importantly for my argument still involved the idea that Blake's poetry acted like a psychedelic drug. Finally, I also want to suggest that the radical concept of Blake's poetry as not only 'psychedelic' in a formal or associative sense, but also in the sense that it actually operates on the consciousness in the same way as a mind-revealing drug, is also shared by other important figures in the Sixties.

Psychedelic Blake

As we have seen, Ginsberg had an early theory of Blake's poetry as 'hermetic, containing some kind of mystical secret of consciousness, which would be referred to by symbols [...]; it might even catalyze that consciousness in them.' This he attempted to use not only to read Blake, but as a guide for writing poetry himself. However, in the same 1976 interview in which he remembers this early idea, he sets out another idea, which seems at first to be the same. He explains that his Blake vision later prompted the realization 'that it was possible in a poem to reproduce some body rhythm which if inserted in other people's bodies might catalyze a similar experience.'⁷⁶ Despite the similar focus on the ability of poetry (and Blake's poetry in particular) to 'catalyze' an altered state of consciousness in the reader, there are important differences between the two theories. The first difference is the absence of any 'mystical secret' in the later notion, while the second difference is the idea that it is a 'body rhythm' rather than a disembodied symbol that forms the link between the poem and the consciousness of the reader. Both of these differences can be directly linked to the profound change in attitude that Ginsberg began to undergo in 1963, at the end of his prolonged visit to India.

This shift in perspective, memorialized in the poem 'The Change: Kyoto-Tokyo Express' (1963) – but also linked to 'Angkor Wat', written a month earlier – has been much written about by other scholars, as well as often spoken about by Ginsberg himself.⁷⁷ What I want to do here is simply to show how this shift in perspective had a

⁷⁶ *Talking Poetics*, p. 382.

⁷⁷ As with the Blake vision itself, the experience encoded in 'The Change' is significant not just because of the actual events involved, but also because of its role in the narrative of Ginsberg's life (including his relationship to Blake), as constructed by Ginsberg and others. As Morris Dickstein suggests, 'The Change' can therefore be seen as 'in the line of the great Romantic poems of crisis and self-recognition'

number of different elements, all of which can be linked to Ginsberg's changing understanding not just of his Blake vision, but also of Blake's poetry itself and how it interacts with the mind.

In the *Paris Review* interview, Ginsberg explains his shift in thinking primarily in terms of its impact on his relationship to Blake and the Blake vision. He remembers writing 'The Change' on a train in Japan in 1963, 'having renounced Blake, renounced visions – renounced *Blake!* – too', and suggests that this represented the end of the cycle which began in 1948 with the Blake vision itself.⁷⁸ However, while this dramatic pronouncement ('renounced *Blake!*') has often been quoted by scholars of Ginsberg's work, it is evident (as I show throughout this study) that Ginsberg did not in any way abandon his interest in Blake, or indeed his interest in the meaning of the Blake vision. Thus in the *Paris Review* interview, Ginsberg immediately refines his definition of what happened in 1963, to suggest that it amounted rather to an abandonment of unhealthy *attachment* to Blake and the Blake vision, a letting go of the 'continual churning thought process of yearning back to a visionary state.'⁷⁹

However, these changes that Ginsberg underwent in the early 1960s also involved a commitment to take 'refuge in the Buddha Dharma Sangha' ('Angkor Wat'), and to abandon not just his 'yearning' for the Blake vision, but also any yearning for or indeed belief in a transcendent other. Instead, as he set out in 'The Change', he would embrace the body itself:

I am that I am the
man & the Adam of hair in
my loins This is my spirit and
physical shape I inhabit
this Universe Oh weeping
against what is my
own nature for now[.]

Therefore, when Ginsberg stops believing that Blake's poetry operates on the consciousness by means of 'hermetic ... symbols' which contain a 'mystical secret', and instead comes to understand his poetry as involving a 'body rhythm' – which is still

(Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* [New York: Basic Books, 1977], p. 21).

⁷⁸ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 49.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

able to catalyze an experience as remarkable as the Blake vision but which does not involve a ‘mystical secret’ – this must be seen in terms of his Sixties shift away from transcendentalism and towards embodied physicality. Such an emphasis on the body can also be linked to the original sexual, masturbatory element of the Blake vision itself, an element which Ginsberg publically describes for the first time in detail in the *Paris Review* interview in 1965.

While Ginsberg dated his own new emphasis on embodied physicality to his writing of ‘The Change’ in 1963, I believe that this shift had begun to take place earlier, particularly in so far as it relates to the new emphasis on the importance of ‘body rhythm’ as the method by which poetry can catalyze different states of consciousness. In a long poem entitled ‘One Day’, contained in his 1961 journal and not collected elsewhere, Ginsberg once again finds himself ‘churning’ over his Blake vision. The poem represents the most detailed narrative description of his Blake vision contained in his poetry (as opposed to interviews or prose), and significantly, four years before the description in the *Paris Review* interview and two years before the writing of ‘The Change’, it also describes the physical and sexual circumstances of the vision:

One day I lay in my bed
 with my cheap pants down
 hairy thin legs exposed
 genitals under my eye
 organs of reproduction black and red
 in the mirror[.]⁸⁰

This passage is immediately followed by a description of the vision which is notable for its anxiety about the reality or otherwise of the experience, but also for its theorizing about the method by which Blake’s poetry operates on the mind:

As I read William Blake
 In Innocence
 That day I heard Blake’s voice
 I say I heard Blake’s voice
 There was something wrong with me,
 aural hallucination
 the reconstruction of syllables on

⁸⁰ Allen Ginsberg, *Journals Early Fifties Early Sixties*, ed. by Gordon Ball (New York: Grove Press, 1977), p. 195.

printed page in iron rhythm
rose to my ear – an ancient
Voice
I heard a physical voice
that was not an hallucination[.]⁸¹

The uncertainty of 'I say I heard Blake's voice' leads to a pathologizing of the experience and a denial of the reality of the vision: 'There was something wrong with me, / aural hallucination'. However, the subsequent theorizing of a physical method by which this 'hallucination' was triggered – 'syllables on / printed page in iron rhythm / rose to my ear' – leads to a renewed assertion of the reality of the experience: 'I heard a physical voice / that was not an hallucination'.

Having now overcome his initial uncertainty, Ginsberg goes on a few lines later to re-emphasize once again the reality of the experience, and to assert his intention to include the reader themselves in the line of vision, using a dramatic physical metaphor for the visionary experience:

No man can deny I had a Vision
and I do not lie
so that my skull is cracked open
and I will crack open your skull
as Blake's skull spoke to mine[.]⁸²

However, this in turn is followed by lines which suggest not only Ginsberg's pre-1963 state of attachment to the vision – 'I despair age 34 attaining that moment again'⁸³ – but also an uncertainty about the efficacy of his own poetic transmission of vision, and indeed about the value of this particular poem itself (which remained in his journal):

because going to die I
write my message and transmit
this fake Eternal Mind
thru memory of what I living once saw.
Albeit this confession sounds bad
it is good[.]⁸⁴

81 Ibid.

⁸² *Journals Early Fifties Early Sixties*, p. 196.

⁸³ *Journals Early Fifties Early Sixties*, p. 197.

84 Ibid.

It would therefore seem that after all only a 'fake Eternal Mind' can be transmitted through this 'bad' confession. Furthermore, just as the poem oscillates between confidence and despair about the reality of the Blake vision and the possibilities for its recovery and retransmission, so too does it lie on the cusp between Ginsberg's original symbolic theory of poetry and his later physical theory. While he refers in the first half of the poem to the 'syllables on / printed page in iron rhythm' as the method by which 'I will crack open your skull / as Blake's skull spoke to mine', by the end of the poem he has returned to his belief that 'Poetry is the secret formula for / miracles',⁸⁵ apparently without the need for an embodied rhythm.

The irony here is that while this 'bad' journal poem was written in 1961, in successful poems of the preceding years, such as 'Howl' (1956) and 'Kaddish' (1959), he had already begun to use rhythm to alter the consciousness of the reader. In an interview conducted in 1968, as he began to work on setting Blake's *Songs* to music following his performance of 'The Grey Monk' in Chicago, he explained that not only was he now realizing how Blake's 'rhythms mean something', but also that it had made him 'conscious of what I'd been doing with breathing as in the Moloch section of *Howl*, or parts of *Kaddish* – that the rhythmic units that I'd written down were basically breathing exercise forms which if anyone else repeated [...] would presumably catalyze in them the same *affects* or emotions.'⁸⁶ Thus, even if he did not realize it at the time, his two most celebrated poems of the 1950s had already used the 'iron rhythm' of 'syllables on / printed page' to 'crack open' the reader's skull as Blake had cracked Ginsberg's skull in 1948.

In interviews of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, Ginsberg continually returns to the idea that there is a physical mechanism by which great poetry, especially that of Blake, affects the mind. As I have shown, he thus leaves behind a theory of poetry's mystical effectiveness based on the 'hermetic' symbolism of words themselves, in favour of a theory based on the physical effect of rhythm and breath. However, two aspects of his new theory are particularly notable. Firstly, while dualistic mysticism is left behind (as is the yearning attachment to vision), Ginsberg does not abandon an interest in the visionary mode itself, and a basic assumption that it is meaningful and powerful.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Allen Ginsberg, *Composed on the Tongue*, ed. by Donald Allen (Bolinax, CA: Grey Fox, 1980), p. 36.

Secondly, as psychedelic drugs become an increasingly important part of the counterculture, Ginsberg starts to describe the effect of Blake on the mind as being akin to that of psychedelic drugs. Furthermore, not only does Blake's poetry 'get you high', it also allows you access to Blake's own visionary state, which during Blake's lifetime and for most of his reception history had been associated with madness, but which was now, in the counterculture of the Sixties, widely seen as desirable.

Thus in the 1965 *Paris Review* interview Ginsberg speculates that 'certain combinations of words and rhythms actually had an electrochemical reaction on the body, which could catalyze specific states of consciousness. I think that's what probably happened to me with Blake.' Although he does not explicitly mention psychedelic drugs here, the process involved is seen as neurological, 'electrochemical'. Furthermore, while this amounts to a general theory of poetry that applies beyond the Blake vision, Ginsberg suggests that with other poets it only 'happens on a [...] lower level'.⁸⁷

Later, Ginsberg makes the link with psychedelics more explicit, and also suggests that the visionary experience accessed via psychedelics or poetry is not so much the experience of a secret, transcendent other universe, but rather the normative state that society must return to. Thus in 1971, Ginsberg explains that

Western civilization has certainly come to this funny kind of contradictory point where finally its technology has produced a chemical which catalyzes a consciousness that finds the entire civilization leading up to that chemical pill absurd, because the consciousness was always there all along with the animals in the forest, or when you were huntin' the animals in the forest. [...] The function of Blake art or Blake's art, is to catalyze that experience in other people [...] as a psychedelic universal cosmic consciousness [...]. So you find in Blake or in any good poetry a series of vowels which if you pronounce them in proper sequence with the breathing indicated by the punctuation [...] will get you high physiologically[.]⁸⁸

In 1986, asked to comment on the significance of drugs to the Sixties, Ginsberg again made the link to Blake, and again suggested that both psychedelics and Blake had helped society return to a consciousness that was 'there all along', achieving

a deconditioning from the old authoritarian work consciousness cultivated by the Vietnam militarization, [...] catalyzing a reconsideration of what was

⁸⁷ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 31.

⁸⁸ *Allen Verbatim*, pp. 17-23.

real and what was unreal, what was illusory and what was hallucination and what was eternal and what was perennial: nature versus hyperindustrialized civilization. The same struggle that Blake had from the very beginning when he said ‘remove those dark satanic mills’ or when he referred to ‘dark satanic mills’ as ‘the dark satanic mills of the mind’ as well as the industrial mills that were blackening the English landscape. So Blake was a key reference there, even in the use of drugs.⁸⁹

Ginsberg therefore reverses the terms usually associated with psychedelic drugs, so that rather than themselves being ‘hallucinogens’, psychedelic drugs help us to recognize that ‘hyperindustrialized civilization’ is a ‘hallucination’. He also implies that his 1948 Blake vision was not a ‘hallucination’ but a vision of ‘what was eternal’, and indeed that Blake’s own visionary mentality demonstrated a unique sanity rather than the madness with which it had frequently been associated. It was Ginsberg’s role in the Sixties to spread that Blakean consciousness, both by ‘turning people on’ to Blake’s poetry and by catalyzing that state in others through the shamanic tools of his own poetry.⁹⁰

Ginsberg however was not the first or only writer to link Blake to psychedelics. As we saw in Chapter One, Ginsberg was delighted to discover that one of the most influential figures in twentieth-century Blake studies, S. Foster Damon, had himself experimented with peyote, which he had taken before Ginsberg was even born. However, while Ginsberg discussed this with Damon in person, the only public acknowledgment that Damon ever made of his use of peyote to investigate Blake was in a single line buried deep in his *Blake Dictionary*, which was itself only published in 1965.⁹¹

While Damon’s personal linking of Blake with mind-altering drugs was little-known in the Sixties even within the world of academic Blake studies, one author who did have a huge impact on the development of a popular association between Blake and

⁸⁹ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 459.

⁹⁰ Several other scholars have also explored various different aspects of the intersection between Ginsberg, Blake, madness, and shamanism. Three fascinatingly different perspectives are provided by Alicia Ostriker, ‘Blake, Ginsberg, Madness, and the Prophet as Shaman’; Tony Trigilio, ‘*Strange Prophecies Anew*’, especially pp. 125-172; and Amy Hungerford, ‘Postmodern Supernaturalism: Ginsberg and the Search for a Supernatural Language’, *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 18 (2005), 269-298.

⁹¹ ‘[T]he thought-emotions which rose from his [Blake’s] subconscious inevitably took human form in visual symbols, with a vividness and completeness comparable to the color-visions of peyote.’ S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (1965; repr. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2013), p. 436.

psychedelics was Aldous Huxley. The more general influence of Blake on Huxley's literature and philosophical worldview has been explored in two excellent recent articles by Nicholas M. Williams and Christoph Bode, but it is significant that both begin their essays with a reference to Huxley's impact on the Sixties reception of Blake, before using this as a jumping off point for a broader investigation of various aspects of the relationship between the two authors.⁹² In fact, both begin their essays with the well-known story of Huxley's indirect transmission of Blake's phrase 'the doors of perception' to Jim Morrison, who used it to name his band, The Doors. However, as Bode shows, this story is incorrect; Morrison may well have read Huxley's book, but he was already very well-versed in Blake's own works, including *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, by the time he named his band.⁹³

It is unsurprising that Morrison was commonly assumed to have borrowed the name of his band from Huxley. Just as many people in the Sixties gained their first basic knowledge of psychedelics from Huxley's two short books on his experiences with mescaline, *The Doors of Perception* and *Heaven and Hell* (first published in 1954 and 1956 respectively, but reprinted as a joint paperback volume from 1960 onwards), these books, with their Blakean titles and references, were also the source for many of their first encounters with Blake's aphorisms, especially of course his dictum 'If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite'. Indeed, while my own primary focus in this study is on Ginsberg as instigator of a Blakean Sixties counterculture, some have given the same role to Huxley. Thus Peter Connors writes that 'the groundwork of the Sixties psychedelic-spiritual movement was laid by the trinity of Albert Hofmann (the Father of psychedelics), Aldous Huxley (the Son who would spread the word), and William Blake (the Holy Ghost).'⁹⁴

While Huxley, unlike Ginsberg, does not suggest that the very process of reading Blake represents a mind-altering experience akin to the ingestion of psychedelics, like Ginsberg he places a high value not only on Blake's poetry but also on Blake's own visionary consciousness, a state which he hopes to replicate with the

⁹² Nicholas M. Williams, "'The Sciences of Life': Living Form in William Blake and Aldous Huxley", *Romanticism*, 15 (2009), 41-53; Christoph Bode, 'Huxley and Blake: The Meeting of the Parallels', in *The Perennial Satirist: Essays in Honour of Bernfried Nugel*, ed. by Hermann J. Real and Peter E. Firchow (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2005), pp. 123-140.

⁹³ Bode, p. 123.

⁹⁴ Peter Connors, *White Hand Society: The Psychedelic Partnership of Timothy Leary and Allen Ginsberg* (San Francisco: City Lights, 2010).

use of psychedelics. Thus he wonders in *The Doors of Perception*, ‘how can we ever visit the worlds which, to Blake [...] were home?’, and admits that as he prepared to take his first mescaline trip, he hoped ‘that the drug would admit me, at least for a few hours, into the kind of inner world described by Blake’.⁹⁵ As I suggested in Chapter One, lines such as these suggest that Huxley’s mescaline trip be interpreted as an approach to studying Blake; equally however, Blake is himself being used by Huxley as a guide to psychedelic voyaging, in the same way that Huxley, Leary and others also used *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* as a psychedelic manual and Huxley’s own Blake-influenced books would themselves later be used as guides.

While the effects of his first trip did not correspond to the Blakean visions he had anticipated, ‘of landscapes with heroic figures, of symbolic dramas trembling perpetually on the verge of the ultimate revelation’,⁹⁶ the experience in fact gave him a deeper insight into the meaning of Blake’s ‘doors of perception’, the phrase which Huxley went on to use as his book title. Huxley realized that in order to help us function in our everyday lives, our minds operate what Huxley called a ‘reducing valve’, filtering our perceptions and giving a restricted vision of reality.⁹⁷ The effect of drugs like mescaline was simply to open up this valve, allowing access to a wider range of perceptions. This was the meaning of Blake’s aphorism in its full form: ‘If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite. / For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro’ narrow chinks of his cavern’ (MHH 14, E39).

Somewhat surprisingly, a recent scientific paper which reports new research into the mechanisms by which psychedelic drugs affect the brain makes an approving reference to Huxley’s ‘reducing valve’, suggesting that the results of MRI scans on subjects who had ingested psilocybin produced findings ‘consistent with Aldous Huxley’s “reducing valve” metaphor [...] which propose[s] that the mind/brain works to constrain its experience of the world’, a constraint that can be temporarily removed by

⁹⁵ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell* (1954, 1956; repr. London: Panther, 1977), pp. 12-13.

⁹⁶ Huxley, p. 13.

⁹⁷ Huxley refers to this idea throughout *The Doors of Perception*. The phrase ‘reducing valve’ is first introduced on page 20.

psychedelics.⁹⁸ The paper makes no reference to the ultimate source of Huxley's metaphor in the Blake 'doors of perception' passage quoted above, but we can nonetheless see in the paper an implicit acknowledgment of the intimate relationship which has grown since the Sixties between Blake and psychedelics. As I have suggested, for Huxley and Ginsberg, this is a circular relationship. Blake is used to understand consciousness (and particularly psychedelic consciousness), but psychedelics are also used to give insight into Blake.

⁹⁸ Robin L. Carhart-Harris and David Erritzoe et al., 'Neural correlates of the psychedelic state as determined by fMRI studies with psilocybin', *PNAS* 109 (2012), 2138-2143 (p. 2142).

Chapter Three: Ginsberg's Blakean Albion

O Blake! Blake! Blake! The yellow sun spanning the green blind Channel.
How sad you'd be to see the dense human fog over London now.
[...] Howling Allen Ginsberg arriving enchanted in England
Weeping at the Foggy earth of England's Blake.

(Ginsberg, untitled poem, 1958)¹

the lambs on the tree-nooked hillside this day bleating
heard in Blake's old ear, & the silent thought of Wordsworth in eld Stillness
clouds passing through skeleton arches of Tintern Abbey –
Bard Nameless as the Vast, babble to Vastness!

(Ginsberg, 'Wales Visitation', 1967)

In this chapter I explore one aspect of Ginsberg's relationship with Blake in more detail, examining Blake's presence within a selection of poems that Ginsberg wrote during visits to Britain between 1958 and 1979. I will suggest that Ginsberg's British poetry can be read in the context of the mythopoetic system developed in Blake's longer prophetic books, particularly in so far as it relates to the British landscape and to the Blakean figures of Albion and Jerusalem. I will also suggest a number of ways in which Ginsberg's poetic vision of a Blakean Albion may be seen as problematic, throwing some light on the broader tensions that exist within Sixties counterculture and also within Romanticism itself.

Through Ginsberg, Blake and his myth of Albion are placed at the heart of a counterculture that is both transatlantic and transgenerational. Therefore 'England's Blake' – as Ginsberg significantly refers to him in the 1958 poem quoted above, perhaps referencing Blake's own description of himself as 'English Blake' (E500) – is linked not only to the Beat movement, but also to Sixties counterculture and even to the punk scene of the Seventies. However, various nationalist tensions can be identified behind this transgenerational internationalism. This is partly because Ginsberg's own position is conflicted; as a key representative of American counterculture, he is nonetheless engaged in these 'British' poems in embracing, re-envisioning and reshaping Blake's land of Albion. Wider themes touched on in this chapter therefore

¹ Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky, *Straight Hearts' Delight: Love Poems and Selected Letters 1947-1980*, ed. by Winston Leyland (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1980), pp. 138-9.

include the ‘Americanization’ of Blake in the Sixties, and the position of Blake within a more specifically British counterculture. Furthermore, I want to suggest that these nationalist tensions within the Sixties can be productively linked to the similar conflicts between nationalism and internationalism that already exist within Blake’s own vision of Albion.

Another area of complexity arises out of the fact that Ginsberg’s British Romantic influences are not restricted to Blake; in the second half of this chapter I explore in detail the Ginsberg poem in which Wordsworth’s influence is felt most strongly, ‘Wales Visitation’ (1967). The twin Blakean and Wordsworthian influences on ‘Wales Visitation’ not only provide an illustration of the way in which Sixties countercultural interest in Romanticism extends beyond William Blake, but also of the way in which different versions of Romanticism interact within Ginsberg’s poetry and the Sixties more broadly.

Blake’s Albion

In order to understand the way in which Ginsberg’s British poems relate to Blake’s myths of Albion and Jerusalem, we need to appreciate the depth of Ginsberg’s knowledge of Blake. The more esoteric aspects of Ginsberg’s enthusiasm for Blake, epitomized by the 1948 Blake vision discussed in the previous chapter, are inextricably linked to his detailed and perceptive readings of Blake’s poetry. From the late 1940s onwards, Ginsberg’s engagement with Blake gradually expanded beyond his early familiarity with the shorter lyric works that had triggered his Blake vision. Through the next three decades, Ginsberg built up a detailed knowledge of the complex mythopoetic psychodrama of Blake’s later prophetic books, which fed into his poetry, prose, letters, and conversations; by the late 1970s Ginsberg was able to teach university seminars that ranged knowledgeably across Blake’s complete oeuvre.

Ginsberg’s interest in Blake also expressed itself in other ways, such as his passion for visiting sites in Britain associated with Blake’s life and mythology, and for viewing original copies of Blake’s texts and artwork in museums and libraries. In one of his British poems, ‘What I’d Like to Do’, written in London in 1973, Ginsberg describes his desire to

Visit Blake’s works all over World West, study prophetic Books interpret
 Blake unify Vision [...]
 Inspiration established compose English Apocalypse American science

Greek rhythm Tibetan mantra Blues [...]
 Compose last choirs of Innocence & Experience, set music to tongues of
 Rossetti Mss. orchestrate Jerusalem's quatrains[.]

By the time he wrote this poem, Ginsberg had already begun some of these projects, not only studying Blake's 'prophetic Books', but also setting to music most of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*. The combination of scholarly and creative tasks that Ginsberg mentions in this Blake-related to-do list highlights the links that he himself made between his more academic study of Blake and his Blakean creative practice.

I will return later to some of the evidence of Ginsberg's evolving understanding of Blake's mythopoetic system, but first I want to offer a brief overview of one aspect of Blake's mythology that is particularly relevant to the poems Ginsberg wrote during his visits to Britain, namely the complex series of overlapping meanings that Blake attached to the term 'Albion'.

Blake sometimes uses the name Albion in its most well-known sense, simply as a poetic synonym for Britain. However, this is complicated by the fact that in Blake's writing the British landscape is loaded with spiritual significance, having the function of a kind of sacred map or microcosm of the universe as a whole. This layering of spiritual meaning applies particularly to London's urban landscape and its immediate surroundings, where he spent nearly his whole life, but also applies to the wider geography of Britain, which he knew only at second hand.

A further layer of complexity is added by Blake's use of the name Albion to refer to a character, part of his pantheon of mythological figures. This character is based partly on antiquarian traditions concerning a giant named Albion who founded and gave his name to the land of Britain. However, in his later works Blake expands and radically transforms these traditions by merging the giant Albion with a figure he had already begun to introduce earlier in his works, the primordial 'Ancient Man' or 'Eternal Man' who represents mankind's prelapsarian state. The resulting multi-layered figure of the giant Albion, still retaining his Britannic and cosmological meanings, takes on a central role in Blake's mythology as the Adamic figure whose fall (or 'sleep') initiates the ongoing dramas of division and union played out by various characters throughout Blake's works.

Blake tells the story of the figure of Albion most fully in his final prophetic books, *Milton a Poem* (c.1804-11) and *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (1804-c.1820), where he adds further layers to the myth by also giving Albion a female

counterpart or ‘emanation’ named Jerusalem.² Like Albion, Blake’s figure of Jerusalem represents both a mythological personage and the geographical location itself, drawing on all the biblical (and more specifically eschatological) connotations of the name, and thereby linking the British landscape with that of ancient Palestine. In Blake’s works, the land of Britain or Albion is therefore heavily imbued with a complex set of interwoven symbolic meanings, which are variously spiritual, psychological and also (as we shall see later in the chapter) political in nature; all of these meanings of Albion can be found in Ginsberg’s works, and in Sixties counterculture more generally.

Blake’s sources (whether first- or second-hand) for this complex, radically polysemous Albion seem to have included a wide variety of texts relating to eighteenth-century British antiquarianism and mythography, and to Kabbalistic mysticism.³ In looking at the manner in which Ginsberg himself imagines Britain as a Blakean Albion, we should be conscious of the fact that he was able to draw not only on his reading of Blake’s works, but also on his familiarity with a range of Blake’s original sources for his myth of Albion, from Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *History of the Kings of Britain*⁴ to the gnostic gospels,⁵ the kabbala,⁶ and Plato’s account of the kingdom of Atlantis.⁷ Blake’s myth of Albion also draws, as with all his work, on his often unconventional readings of the Bible and Milton, sources which Ginsberg was also familiar with, and which according to his journals he read or re-read at key moments relating to the composition of many of the poems under discussion here.⁸ It hardly needs pointing out

² Both *Milton* and *Jerusalem* also have a complex textual relationship with Blake’s much-revised and eventually abandoned book *Vala or The Four Zoas* (c.1797-c.1807). The figure of the ‘Eternal Man’ plays a central role in the original *Vala*, but it is not until Blake’s later revisions to the text (including the incorporation of significant sections into *Milton* and *Jerusalem*) that this ‘Eternal Man’ is named as Albion and therefore associated with the British landscape and people. Some of Blake’s earlier works, including *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), also make reference to Albion both as a giant and as a synonym for Britain, but do not yet assign to him his eventual role as the undivided ‘Eternal Man’.

³ See Jason Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), and Sheila A. Spector, *Wonders Divine: The Development of Blake’s Kabbalistic Myth* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2001).

⁴ See Ginsberg’s ‘reading list’ for October 1946, in *The Book of Martyrdom and Artifice: First Journals and Poems, 1937-1952*, ed. by Juanita Lieberman-Plimpton and Bill Morgan (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2006), p. 152.

⁵ For a good example of Ginsberg’s knowledge of gnostic texts, especially in the context of Blake, see the 1978 Naropa class ‘Urizen and Gnostic Background’, transcribed at the *Allen Ginsberg Project* site <<http://allenginsberg.org/#!/archive/lecture/william-blake-class-2-urizen-and-gnostic-background?id=524aed2cf6d2f01caa000003>> [accessed 10 May 2014].

⁶ Ginsberg’s reading of a wide range of mystical texts, including the kabbala, is referenced for example in ‘Howl’: ‘who studied Plotinus Poe St. John of the Cross telepathy and bop kabbalah’.

⁷ See Allen Ginsberg, *Journals Mid-Fifties: 1954-1958*, ed. by Gordon Ball (London: Viking, 1995), p. 236.

⁸ See for example his 8 December 1960 letter to Gregory Corso: ‘I’m through magic psalming outside myself to find the great power of being. I am the great magician henceforth. I’m reading Milton and will

that all of this runs contrary to Norman Podhoretz's infamous 1958 characterization of the Beats as 'Know-Nothing Bohemians'.⁹

'Allen Ginsberg arriving enchanted in England'

Ginsberg visited England for the first time in February 1958, after nearly a year spent travelling in Morocco and continental Europe alongside fellow Beats including William Burroughs, Gregory Corso and Peter Orlovsky. The opportunity to visit Blake's homeland came courtesy of the BBC, who had invited Ginsberg to record some of his poems for the radio. During this visit he also composed several poems, including an untitled poem beginning 'O Blake! Blake! Blake!', which he copied into a letter to Orlovsky.¹⁰ In the poem, Ginsberg reveals the emotional effect of finally arriving in Blake's Albion; thus, after disembarking from the ferry at Dover, Ginsberg finds himself 'Weeping at the Foggy earth of England's Blake'. Although he also describes himself as 'enchanted' (and, punningly, as 'Howling'), the downbeat tone of this first record of his arrival in Blake's Albion is unexpected and significant.

'Weeping' should be recognized as a characteristically Blakean response; there are thirty-seven instances of 'weep', 'wept' or 'weeping' in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* alone. Significantly however, it is a response associated in Blake not only with the extremes of emotion but also with the power of prophecy. For example, in *Milton* (a key text for the discussion of Blake's and Ginsberg's visions of Albion in this chapter) Blake describes how 'the whole Assembly wept prophetic' at the sight of Milton leaving heaven and returning to the earthly Albion (M 14:11, E108). As I discussed in Chapter Two, there are obvious analogies to be made between Ginsberg's 1948 Blake vision and Blake's own vision of Milton appearing in the garden of his Sussex cottage and being symbolically absorbed into Blake's body, an experience he described and also visually depicted in *Milton*. That this continuation of the line of poetic influence is not only textual but also physical is suggested by Ginsberg's 1971

go back to Blake's Milton too' (*The Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, ed. by Bill Morgan [Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2008], p. 237.).

⁹ Norman Podhoretz, 'The Know-Nothing Bohemians', *Partisan Review* 25.2 (1958): 305–18.

¹⁰ The complete letter, including this poem, is published in *Straight Hearts' Delight*, pp. 136–139. The poem has never been included in any of Ginsberg's poetry collections. An earlier draft of the poem appears in *Journals Mid-Fifties*, pp. 419–20.

assertion that ‘the voice I heard, the voice of Blake, the ancient saturnal voice, is the voice I have now.’¹¹

Ginsberg’s prophetic absorption of Blake’s voice, and also his later role in popularizing Blake within Sixties counterculture in both America and Britain, make it significant that in his 1958 poem he seems to envisage William Blake arriving alongside him in the cold, foggy England of the 1950s, as if Ginsberg is personally bringing Blake back to Albion in preparation for the Sixties. He also imagines Blake sharing in his own emotions: ‘How sad you’d be to see the dense human fog over London now.’ As this line makes clear, despite the vatic associations of weeping in Blake’s work, Ginsberg also clearly sees sadness or weeping as an appropriate and inevitable emotional response to an encounter with this fallen, or sleeping, version of Albion.

Weeping is something of a recurring trope in Ginsberg’s British poems, but so too is the ‘fog’ with which it is associated in the lines just quoted. Taking on both a physical and symbolic form, it appears in Ginsberg’s poetry in the urban setting of London as well as drifting through the rural landscape of ‘Wales Visitation’ (1967), which begins with the image of ‘White fog lifting & falling on mountain-brow’. However, the symbolic image of London’s ‘human fog’ also reappears further on in Ginsberg’s 1958 poem, when he imagines

dead Shelley & Bright Blake
Mortal & Mindless in the maze of ancient cranes & girders
and faces glaring with the broken consciousness
of rooves [*sic*], smoke, chimneys, churches, rays of lights,
and the great bleak acrid fog of lack love mind strain
rusting the eyes with tears and twisting soft mouths into iron.

We can identify in these lines a reworking of Blake’s ‘London’, from *Songs of Experience*. Blake’s ‘every face I meet’, with its ‘Marks of weakness, marks of woe’ is echoed in Ginsberg’s ‘faces glaring with the broken consciousness’, while Blake’s image of ‘mind-forg’d manacles’ becomes Ginsberg’s ‘great bleak acrid fog of lack love mind strain’. However, as so often with Ginsberg’s Blake references, there is also a link to be made between this passage and his 1948 ‘Blake vision’. In Ginsberg’s first prose account of his vision, the journal entry from April 1949, he describes how this

¹¹ Allen Ginsberg, ‘Blake/Poetry Class: Kent State’ (1971), in *Allen Verbatim: Lectures on Poetry, Politics, Consciousness*, ed. by Gordon Ball (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974), pp. 15-23 (p.21).

experience of altered consciousness began as he was walking along a street in Harlem, when suddenly the ‘whole appearance of the world changed’:

I began to look at people walking past me. They all had incredible sleepy, bestial expressions on their faces [...] [showing] anguished fear that someone would take the initiative and discover their masks and lies. [...] [T]his in the world is called coyness and shyness and politeness, or frigidity and hostility when the awareness becomes too overpowering. I felt that I would be crucified if I alluded with any insistence to the divine nature of ourselves and the physical universe.¹²

In this journal account, Ginsberg describes how he immediately thought of the parallels between his own experience and that described in Blake’s ‘London’, which he re-read as soon as he returned to his apartment. This reading of ‘London’, along with other Blake poems, stimulating the further bout of altered consciousness which he later referred to as his ‘Blake vision’.¹³

Several points emerge when we link Blake’s poem ‘London’, the London section of Ginsberg’s untitled 1958 poem, and Ginsberg’s early journal account of his 1948 ‘Blake vision’. It is notable that while all three pieces feature Blake and Ginsberg presenting prophetic insights into a reality that lies beneath the surface of everyday life, this visionary mode is strongly negative. The London that is described in Blake’s poem of the same title, and which lies behind both the Ginsberg pieces, is representative (in the terms of Blake’s later fully-developed Albion myth) of a sleeping rather than an awakened Albion; it does not seem to be equivalent to ‘the spiritual Four-fold London eternal’ which Blake describes in *Milton* (M 6:1, E99).

Although in the 1958 poem Ginsberg imagines Blake sharing in his own highly emotional state (‘How sad you’d be to see the dense human fog over London now’), in the accompanying letter to Orlovsky he complains that the present-day English poets he meets are ‘afraid to be real & expose themselves’. Ginsberg then expresses the hope that his Blakean or Whitmanian emotional candour may ultimately lead to a transformation of England and the English, in Blakean terms a reunification of Albion and Jerusalem: ‘I felt great again, communicating & crying in public – in front of the mild withdrawn English (Blake is right dreaming about Jerusalem to come to England someday).’¹⁴

¹² *The Book of Martyrdom and Artifice*, pp. 264-5.

¹³ As discussed in Chapter Two, there are significant differences between this early journal account of the 1948 Blake vision and Ginsberg’s later recollections of the experience in the *Paris Review* interview and elsewhere.

¹⁴ *Straight Hearts’ Delight*, pp. 136-7.

Ginsberg's description of the 'mild withdrawn English', who are 'afraid to be real & expose themselves', seems to link back to the people in his 1948 vision, with their fear that someone might 'discover their masks and lies', their 'coyness and shyness and politeness, or frigidity'. Even more significant however is what Ginsberg identifies as their 'hostility [...] to the divine nature of ourselves and the physical universe'. It should be remembered that in Blake's mythology, both these 'divine nature[s]' are represented by the unfallen version of Albion itself, which encompasses mankind's original state, the microcosmic sacred British landscape, and also finally the macrocosmic 'physical universe' as a whole. In contrast, the inhabitants of Fifties England, like the people in Ginsberg's 'Blake vision', are trapped in a state of emotional, psychological and bodily division that is the consequence of the fall of Albion.

However, while Ginsberg initially encounters Blake's giant Albion still deep in its deathly sleep, he also clearly has hopes of reawakening it, by reintroducing the spirit of Blake himself to the land of Albion. According to Ginsberg's letter, this reawakening of Albion will begin with his BBC recording, 'a huge mad broadcast to all England', during which he again took on the role of weeping prophet, communicating with (and reunifying) Blake and England: 'I started & gave slow sorrowful reading, built up, almost broke down in tears again, dreaming I was talking thru microphone to the Soul in the Fog, read to Blake himself'.¹⁵ In his next letter to Orlovsky, Ginsberg explicitly states his hopes for the broadcast: 'it will have an effect I'm sure once they broadcast that BBC record, open the floodgates in London maybe'.¹⁶ On one level, Ginsberg's image of himself 'open[ing] the floodgates' refers to nothing more than his desire to shake up the frigid local poetry scenes he complains about in England. However, we can also recognize a Blakean, eschatological aspect to the opening of these 'floodgates'. A few weeks later, in a further letter, Ginsberg describes how, much like Blake himself, he intends 'to write a new book of a Bible': 'we must write Bibles for [the] Milleneum [*sic*] [...] to tell everyone it's here, at hand & foot'.¹⁷ This apocalyptic millennialism is characteristic of Blake's own work and is an important trope not only in Ginsberg's poems but also in Sixties counterculture more generally. Thus, as we saw in Chapter One, Theodore Roszak's *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1969) uses as its epigraph

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 137.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 143.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 154, 158.

the chiliastic injunction from Blake's 'Preface' to *Milton*: 'Rouze up O Young Men of the New Age!' (E95).

In the letters and poems Ginsberg writes while in England in 1958, it is clear that he sees himself not just as one of Blake's 'Young Men of the New Age', but in fact as a poet-prophet like Blake himself, sharing with Blake the role of awakening Albion to a new age. In 'Europe! Europe!', also partly composed during Ginsberg's 1958 visit to England, he writes

I weep for this antiquity
and herald the Millennium
for I saw the Atlantic sun
rayed down from a vast cloud
at Dover on the sea cliffs[.]

In taking on this prophetic role, he not only 'herald[s] the Millennium' but also, as we have seen, expresses hopes of purposefully awakening Albion into 'the New Age' of the counterculture. By the end of the following decade he had been more successful in his aims than even he might have originally hoped. As we will see later in the chapter, several figures from the British counterculture of the 1960s were only too eager to confirm Ginsberg in the role of the prophet who had been personally responsible for bringing Blake and his prophesied 'New Age' back to Britain. So, for example, Michael Horovitz hailed Ginsberg as the 'high priest [...] called for to revive Albion today'.¹⁸ Ginsberg was thus made typologically equivalent to the figure of Milton the 'Awakener' in Blake's Albion myth:

The Awakener is come. outstretched over Europe! the Vision of God is
fulfilled
The Ancient Man upon the Rock of Albion Awakes[.]
(M 25:22-23, E122)

Ginsberg's American Blake

One of the ways in which Ginsberg played a role in bringing the Sixties into being was by himself prophesying their arrival. For example, a 1960 journal entry declares that '1960 has come with its apocalypse'.¹⁹ Ginsberg's 1959 'Independence Day Manifesto'

¹⁸ 'Afterwords', in *Children of Albion: Poetry of the Underground in Britain*, ed. by Michael Horovitz (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), pp. 316-377 (p. 344).

¹⁹ Allen Ginsberg, *Journals Early Fifties Early Sixties*, ed. by Gordon Ball (New York: Grove Press, 1977), p. 171.

– to which he also gave the very Blakean alternative title ‘Poetry, Violence, and the Trembling Lambs’ – can be seen as an even more self-conscious marker of the apocalyptic end of the current era and beginning of a new age. In the ‘Manifesto’, he identifies 1950s America as a place ‘gone mad with materialism, a police-state America, a sexless and soulless America’, and contrasts this with ‘the historic America of William Blake and Henry David Thoreau where the spiritual independence of each individual was an America’.²⁰ The link Ginsberg makes between Blake and Thoreau is not surprising in itself; as we saw in Chapter One, the Transcendentalists played an important (albeit still little-researched) role in the early history of Blake’s American reception. However, by writing of ‘the historic America of William Blake’, Ginsberg goes somewhat further than merely pointing out links between British Romanticism and American Transcendentalism; it appears rather that he wants to actually claim Blake for America. One possible explanation for how Ginsberg arrived at this seemingly oxymoronic written formulation could be that he had in mind Blake’s poem *America a Prophecy* (1793), which he had read in 1957, although it is not at all obvious that Blake’s poem does in fact define ‘the spiritual independence of each individual [as] an America’.²¹ Overall, this can be seen as a good example of what Franca Bellarsi means when she refers to the Beats ‘redefin[ing] the American Frontier in terms of a cleansing of perception and of the pushing back of mental boundaries.’²²

Ginsberg’s literal Americanization of Blake in his ‘Independence Day Manifesto’ highlights the nationalist tensions inherent in Ginsberg’s engagement with Blake more generally, and particularly his position as an American poet and countercultural icon who was engaged in the task of introducing the spirit of ‘England’s Blake’ not only into the emergent American counterculture, but also back into the land of Albion itself. Blake’s countercultural Americanization can in fact be said to begin

²⁰ Allen Ginsberg, ‘Poetry, Violence, and the Trembling Lambs’, in *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays 1952-1995*, ed. by Bill Morgan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2000), pp. 3-5 (p. 5).

²¹ See Ginsberg’s ‘Reading List’ for 1957, in *Journals Mid-Fifties*, p. 411. Another possible intertext here is the conversation between Blake and the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Having asked them various questions about the nature of vision and reality (‘does a firm perswasion that a thing is so, make it so?’), Blake then enquires why they take part in various specific spiritual practices, to which he receives the answer: ‘the desire of raising other men in to a perception of the infinite[;] this the North American tribes practise’ (E39). Thus Blake makes a direct link between the spiritual traditions of ancient Israel and the Native Americans.

²² Franca Bellarsi, ‘“Death to Van Gogh’s Ear!”: The Beat Generation and its Surrealist Politics of Mysticism’, in *Historical Avant-Garde: Poetics and Politics*, ed. by Sascha Bru, Philippe Codde, and Bart Keunen (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), pp. 83-106 (p. 88).

with Ginsberg's 1948 Blake vision itself; as Terence Diggory points out, 'the voice of Blake takes on an American accent in Ginsberg's East Harlem apartment'.²³

When Ginsberg next returned to England in 1965 he was able to claim the role not only of a Blakean poet-prophet but of a king. Having been deported to England from Czechoslovakia following his election by Czech students to the symbolic position of 'King of May', he composed the poem 'Kral Majales', which contains a number of significant Blakean references. Ginsberg describes himself arriving 'in a giant jetplane touching Albion's airfield', and looking forward to again making pilgrimages to Blake's grave in Bunhill Fields cemetery and to Hampstead Heath, an area associated with both Blake and Keats.²⁴ However, he is also keen to emphasize his own status as a visionary successor to Blake. Among the many reasons Ginsberg lists in the poem for why the title 'King of May' should 'naturally' belong to him, he includes 'because I heard the voice of Blake in a vision, / And repeat that voice.' Despite the poem being written two years after 'The Change', in which he supposedly abandoned his attachment to his Blake vision, there is no sign in 'Kral Majales' of any lessening of that attachment. Indeed, it seems significant that the *Paris Review* interview, in which Ginsberg gave his fullest account of the Blake vision, also took place shortly after he arrived in England in 1965. Tom Clark, who conducted the interview, later attributed its success to 'the shadow-presence of Blake on the landscape'.²⁵

There is one further aspect of 'Kral Majales' that can be seen to provide an important link with Blake's Albion myth. In listing in the poem all the reasons why he deserves the title of 'King of May', Ginsberg seems to be building up an image of himself as the primal unfallen man, Albion or Adam himself: 'I am the King of May, which is long hair of Adam and the Beard of my own body / [...] which is old Human poesy'. Having transformed himself since his first visit to England into the familiar full-bearded icon of Sixties counterculture, Ginsberg had not only awoken Albion, but had apparently even *become* Albion. As the Sixties progressed, other 'Young Men [and Women] of the New Age', on both sides of the Atlantic, followed his lead. In a 1968 interview Ginsberg described how 'many of the longhaired kids are turning into Adam

²³ Terence Diggory, 'Allen Ginsberg's Urban Pastoral', in *The Beat Generation: Critical Essays*, ed. by Kostas Myrsiades (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 201-218 (p. 208).

²⁴ Ginsberg had first visited Blake's grave in 1958 with Gregory Corso (*Straight Hearts' Delight*, p. 170). He mentions Hampstead Heath's links to Keats and Constable, though not Blake, in a note in *Collected Poems*, p. 783n. In the last years of his life, Blake had spent every Sunday in Hampstead visiting John Linnell, one of the 'Ancients' (see Bentley, *Stranger from Paradise*, pp. 431-3).

²⁵ Quoted in *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 18.

and realizing [...] that they're walking on the green of antiquity, a "green and pleasant land," the ancient New Jerusalem Blake envisaged as possible in England.'²⁶

During his 1965 visit to England Ginsberg also wrote 'Who Be Kind To', a poem which (alongside much Blakean weeping) celebrates the arrival of the Sixties in Britain as an awakening of Albion:

[...] as the Liverpool Minstrels of CavernSink
raise up their joyful voices and guitars
in electric Afric hurrah for Jerusalem—
The saints come marching in, Twist &
Shout, and Gates of Eden are named in Albion again[.]

Ginsberg suggests here that the Blakean energy of the Beatles and Bob Dylan has awoken Britain (significantly figured here as both Albion and Jerusalem) from the state of Fifties torpor in which he found it languishing during his first visit seven years earlier. However in the line 'Gates of Eden are named in Albion again' he also goes further, apparently positioning Dylan as another poetic successor to Blake; the Blakean influence on Dylan to which Ginsberg here alludes is explored in detail in Chapter Four.

Ginsberg's reference in the poem to the gospel hymn 'When the Saints Go Marching In' also reminds us of the eschatological meaning of Albion's awakening in Blake's myth; Albion's typological links with both Adam and Jesus are highlighted earlier in 'Who Be Kind To' through the reference to 'the prophecies of the Crucified Adam Son'. This millennialism is particularly present in the final lines, where Ginsberg asserts

That a new kind of man has come to his bliss
to end the cold war he has borne
against his own kind flesh
since the days of the snake.

The prophetic resonances of these lines are both biblical and Blakean. In Blake's myth, the fall of the Eternal Man leads to his division, not only between his male and female parts (Albion and Jerusalem), but also between the four Zoas or aspects of human psychology, whose struggles against each other will end only when Albion reawakens in its undivided form. For Ginsberg, it is the 'new kind of man' of the Sixties, with 'long hair of Adam', who will achieve this blissful reunification of Albion and 'end the cold war he has borne / against his own kind flesh'. Thus Ginsberg not only recasts the

²⁶ Allen Ginsberg, 'Playboy Interview' (1969), in *Spontaneous Mind*, pp. 159-196 (p. 188).

social and political revolutions of the Sixties in terms of Blakean prophecy, but also re-historicizes and re-politicizes Blake for the Sixties. As we will see at the end of this chapter, the link between the Cold War and the division of Albion or the Eternal Man, a link which Ginsberg first makes in 'Who Be Kind To', continues and evolves in Ginsberg's work of the 1970s and 1980s, where Ginsberg uses poetry, prose and particularly his Naropa lectures to draw repeated parallels between the repressive, rationalistic figure of Urizen (one of the four Zoas into which Albion has split) and atomic weapons, nuclear power, and Cold War warriors such as Margaret Thatcher.

On 11 June 1965, three days after composing 'Who Be Kind To', Ginsberg read the poem to an audience of seven thousand people in London's Royal Albert Hall. Organized at very short notice, largely to take advantage of the temporary presence of Ginsberg, Corso and other American poets in London, the 'International Poetry Incarnation' has variously been described as marking either the beginning or the climax of the Sixties in Britain.²⁷ For poet and artist Jeff Nuttall, a key figure in the British counterculture, it was self-evident that the 'International Poetry Incarnation' marked the return of Blake to London. Immediately after the event he wrote to a friend: 'London is in flames. The spirit of William Blake walks on the water of Thames.'²⁸

With Ginsberg at its centre, it was almost inevitable that the 'International Poetry Incarnation' would be conceived of in Blakean terms. Ginsberg and some of the other poets jointly composed an 'Invocation', which they read at the press conference held in advance of the event. Beginning with six lines lifted directly from Blake's *Jerusalem*, the 'Invocation' explicitly announced that the Albert Hall gathering would be an awakening of Albion:

England! awake! awake! awake!
 Jerusalem thy Sister calls!
 * * * *
 And now the time returns again:
 Our souls exult, & London's towers
 Receive the Lamb of God to dwell
 In England's green & pleasant bowers.²⁹

²⁷ See for example Jonathon Green, *All Dressed Up: The Sixties and the Counterculture* (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 128-149.

²⁸ Jeff Nuttall, *Bomb Culture* (London: Paladin, 1970), p. 183.

²⁹ Allen Ginsberg and others, 'Invocation', in *Wholly Communion*, ed. by Peter Whitehead (London: Lorrimer Films, 1965), p. 9. The lines are from *Jerusalem* plate 77 (E233).

When set within the new textual context of the 1965 'Invocation' (in which the following lines are 'World declaration hot peace shower! Earth's grass is free!'), the meaning of these lines from *Jerusalem* shifts from the specific contexts of Blake's mythological system to a more general Sixties millennialism. However, looking back on the 'International Poetry Incarnation' in a 1986 interview, Ginsberg replaced the lines in their original context, explaining the significance of Blake's concept of Albion as the undivided 'Eternal Man':

So I think the implication of the sixties was, as Blake pointed out, that hyperrationalism has created chaos so that the body's existence, the existence of feeling, and the existence of the poetic imagination, the fantasy and dream, the poetry, have to be acknowledged as equal partners in Albion, the whole man. That was Blake's formulation, and the Blake quote that was used as the motto for the original Albert Hall Poetry Incarnation was 'England, awake, awake, awake,' so as to awaken Albion.³⁰

In thus focusing on the double meaning of Albion, as England and as the universal 'Eternal Man', Ginsberg's words draw attention to the complex balance of nationalism and internationalism present within both the 'Invocation' and the 'International Poetry Incarnation' as a whole.

However, as Daniel Kane has pointed out, the Albert Hall reading was in any case somewhat less internationalist than its title made out, with the American poets dominating the event.³¹ Ginsberg complained that there were 'too many superficial bards who read tinkly jazzy beatnick style poems', an apparent dig at the British imitators of the Beats.³² Although Kane does not make the link to Blake, I would argue that the set of nationalist tensions that he identifies both within the event itself and within *Wholly Communion*, Peter Whitehead's documentary film of the event, are the same tensions I have already highlighted regarding Ginsberg's relationship to Blake in general and to Blake's Albion more specifically.³³ Kane's assertion that Ginsberg and the other American Beat poets 'saw no contradiction in positioning themselves as antiestablishment figures while maintaining a marked patriotism'³⁴ finds clear

³⁰ 'Interview by Simon Albury' (1986), in *Spontaneous Mind*, pp. 452-468 (p. 468).

³¹ See Daniel Kane, 'Wholly Communion, Literary Nationalism, and the Sorrows of the Counterculture', in *Framework* 52.1 (2011), 104-127.

³² Quoted in Kane, p. 113.

³³ The second part of Kane's argument is that rather than marking a triumphant flowering of British and global Sixties counterculture, both the event and the film capture 'the Sorrows of the Counterculture'. This can also be linked to my own material. As I have shown, Ginsberg's representations of Albion are to a surprising degree marked by 'weeping' and by a negative form of the visionary mode.

³⁴ Kane, p. 105.

confirmation in the passage I quoted earlier from Ginsberg's 1959 'Independence Day Manifesto', in which Blake himself is seemingly re-cast as an American and Blake's poetry is identified with a golden age in which 'the spiritual independence of each individual was an America'. This is a paradigm of the kind of 'literary nationalism' that makes Ginsberg's championing of 'England's Blake' problematic. However, I also want to suggest in this chapter that these nationalist tensions are complicated further by the fact that Blake's radically polysemous Albion myth already contains its own set of nationalist tensions.

**'All things begin & end in Albions ancient Druid rocky shore': Blake's
Anglocentrism**

When Ginsberg writes in his 1958 letter of 'Blake [...] dreaming about Jerusalem to come to England someday', he is most likely referring to Blake's 'Preface' to *Milton*, which imagines the rebuilding of 'Jerusalem, / In Englands green & pleasant Land' (M 1:15-16, E96). While Ginsberg would no doubt have been familiar with the early twentieth-century choral setting that has made these Blake's best-known lines, by 1958 he was also able to situate them within the original context of Blake's complex Albion myth, having first read *Milton* as far back as 1949.³⁵ My research suggests that this 1949 reading was Ginsberg's first encounter with one of Blake's longer prophetic books, and it is significant that Ginsberg read what is in part the story of Blake's visionary encounter with Milton just months after his own visionary encounter with Blake; indeed, the reading may well have been a direct response to his own vision, much as he re-read other visionary texts in the more immediate aftermath of the vision. Ginsberg would later go on to re-read *Milton* several more times, including in 1960 (a re-reading inspired in part by Ginsberg's desire to better understand his own first experience with psilocybin mushrooms)³⁶ and in 1978-79 (when he taught Blake's complete works at Naropa).³⁷

With this specific evidence of Ginsberg's early familiarity with *Milton*, we can also link Ginsberg's statement about 'Blake [...] dreaming about Jerusalem to come to

³⁵ Allen Ginsberg, *The Book of Martyrdom and Artifice*, p. 259.

³⁶ See *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, p. 237. It is apparent from this and other descriptions Ginsberg gives of his visionary experiences (both 'natural' and drug-induced) that they are often highly literary experiences; not only are they sometimes triggered by the reading of literary works, but they also often lead to Ginsberg re-reading certain texts in an effort to understand the vision. This process of literary 'cause and effect' is particularly apparent in his *Paris Review* description of the Blake vision.

³⁷ Barry Miles, *Ginsberg: A Biography* (London: Viking, 1989), p. 473.

England' with a number of other passages from the same prophetic book.³⁸ In particular, Ginsberg would already on this first visit to England have been conscious of the peculiar status of Blake's figures of Albion and Jerusalem as both localized and universal. Thus on plate six of *Milton* (E99-100), Blake sets out his vision of 'Golgonooza the spiritual Four-fold London eternal', before asking 'When shall Jerusalem return & overspread all the Nations', and finally declaring that 'All things begin & end in Albions ancient Druid rocky shore', a line whose importance is emphasized by the fact that it also recurs twice in *Jerusalem* (E171, E196). Elsewhere in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, Blake links his visionary Albion to a series of specific locations in Britain. Ginsberg made Blakean pilgrimages to many of these locations during his various visits to the UK, and in a 1976 recording of one of his lectures on Blake, Ginsberg can be heard singing the section of *Jerusalem* that begins:

The fields from Islington to Marybone,
To Primrose Hill and Saint Johns Wood:
Were builded over with pillars of gold,
And there Jerusalems pillars stood.
(J 27, E171)³⁹

A site of particular significance in Blake's Albion myth is Dover; this was also where Ginsberg had first disembarked, and Dover's cliffs feature in both his untitled 1958 poem and in 'Europe! Europe!'. Albion's relationship of mystical equivalence to the universe as a whole leads Blake to refer to 'Albions Cliffs in which the Four-fold World resides' (M 39:60, E141). Dover also features significantly on plate 26 of *Milton* (E123-4) where Blake not only visually depicts the famous white cliffs, but also suggests that Dover marks the eastern gatepost of one of the 'Two Gates thro which all Souls descend', which stretch along the south coast of England and the north coast of Scotland. Blake seems to intend these gates to represent birth and death, meaning that, as Jason Whittaker has pointed out, the 'area of Albion thus becomes the arena of fallen life'.⁴⁰ Therefore when Ginsberg disembarks at Dover in 1958, setting foot on 'the

³⁸ Ginsberg's words could also be linked to similar passages in *Jerusalem* and *The Four Zoas*, including the lines later quoted in the 1965 'Invocation'. However, although Ginsberg certainly read these works later on, I have not been able to discover any hard evidence that he had already read them by 1958.

³⁹ The recording itself is on the *Naropa University Archives* site

<<http://cdm16621.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p16621coll1/id/1114/rec/1>> [accessed 2 April 2014], and a transcript of the lecture is on the *Allen Ginsberg Project* site

<<http://ginsbergblog.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/spontaneous-poetics-126-william-blake.html>> [accessed 2 April 2014].

⁴⁰ Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, p. 49.

foggy earth of England's Blake', it is in terms of Blakean mythology a highly symbolic act; he is entering both Albion and the state of earthly existence itself.

Lines from *Milton* such as those quoted above make particularly apparent one fascinating and problematic aspect of Blake's mythology, namely the fact that his vision of Albion is fundamentally Anglocentric and even nationalistic in nature. According to Blake, Albion is the chosen nation, the origin of all things, and in its personified form also the founding father of all humanity. Despite Blake's liberal credentials, it is in many ways hardly surprising that the 'Preface' to *Milton*, in its choral setting as 'Jerusalem', should in more recent times have become a key part of such patriotic British traditions as the 'Last Night of the Proms'.⁴¹ The nationalism inherent in Blake's Albion myth seems particularly paradoxical when we consider that Blake himself was a lifelong political and religious radical, whose anti-establishment status was cemented by his friendship with Tom Paine, and especially by his trial for sedition in 1804 after he allegedly damned the King of England and expressed the hope that the French would invade.

Blake's claim that 'All things begin & end in Albions ancient Druid rocky shore', and that 'Albion covered the whole Earth, England encompassed the Nations' (J 24:44, E170), was of course in many ways literally true in the time in which Blake was writing. Referring to the way in which, during the interlinked composition of *Milton*, *Jerusalem* and *The Four Zoas*, Blake gradually combines the originally separate figure of the giant Albion with that of the fallen Eternal Man (and also sets the whole myth in an increasingly Christian context), Andrew Lincoln suggests that Blake thereby subsumes 'world history into a British perspective in a way that disconcertingly shadows contemporary attempts to widen British global influence.'⁴² In *Romantic Imperialism*, Saree Makdisi offers a more extended historicist reading of Blake's Albion myth, convincingly arguing for the centrality of the politics of Empire within not only

⁴¹ The contested and problematic status of 'Jerusalem' in modern British culture has been explored in several recent articles: Shirley Dent, "'Thou readst white where I readst black": William Blake, the Hymn 'Jerusalem', and the Far Right', in *Re-envisioning Blake*, ed. by Mark Crosby, Troy Patenaude and Angus Whitehead (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 48-62; Jason Whittaker, 'Mental Fight, Corporeal War, and Righteous Dub: The Struggle for "Jerusalem", 1979-2009', in *Blake 2.0: William Blake in Twentieth-Century Art, Music and Culture*, ed. by Steve Clark, Tristanne Connolly, and Jason Whittaker (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 263-273.

⁴² Andrew Lincoln, 'From America to *The Four Zoas*', in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. by Morris Eaves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 210-230 (p. 224).

Milton and Jerusalem but also 'London'.⁴³ Ginsberg himself also clearly recognized this link between Blake's Albion myth and the history of British imperialism. In a 1978 Naropa lecture, discussing Blake's vision of 'the Twelve Sons of Albion / Enrooted into every Nation: a mighty Polypus growing / From Albion over the whole earth' (J 15:3-5, E159), Ginsberg comments 'I guess that would be the English empire'.⁴⁴

The Anglocentrism of Blake's Albion myth can only serve to complicate the nationalist tensions I have already identified within Ginsberg's American appropriation of Blake. Makdisi describes the paradoxically nationalist discourse of Blake's Albion myth as 'a vision of anti-imperial imperialism';⁴⁵ this in many ways is the parallel of Kane's description of the American Beat poets 'positioning themselves as antiestablishment figures while maintaining a marked patriotism'.

Wales Visitation

We have already seen how in 'Kral Majales', Ginsberg looks forward to revisiting Blake's grave in London's Bunhill Fields cemetery; this was just one of many Blakean pilgrimages that he undertook, not only to sites in England associated with Blake's life, but also to the various libraries and museums around the world that house original copies of Blake's pictures and manuscripts.⁴⁶ However, Ginsberg's Romantic influences extended beyond Blake, and this is reflected in the other sites that he visited. Thus in 'Igny' (1958) he recalls the typically emotional visits he had made the previous year to the graves of Keats and Shelley in Rome:

Igny with his wild mop walks by Colosseum weeping
he plucks a clover from Keats' grave & Shelley's a blade of grass[.]⁴⁷

⁴³ See the chapter 'William Blake and Universal Empire', in Saree Makdisi, *Romantic Imperialism: Universal Empire and the Culture of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 154-172.

⁴⁴ Lecture transcript at *The Allen Ginsberg Project* <<http://allenginsberg.org/#!/archive/lecture/william-blake-class-11-urizen-continues?id=524b1170f6d2f01caa000018>> [accessed 5 May 2014].

⁴⁵ Makdisi, p. 172.

⁴⁶ 'Whatever big city you are in you ought to go to a big library and take a look at the original Blake. [...] It's better than going to the movies.' Lecture transcript <<http://ginsbergblog.blogspot.co.uk/2013/09/spontaneous-poetics-134.html>> [accessed 5 May 2014].

⁴⁷ The poem's reference to Keats and Shelley then inspires in Ginsberg thoughts of Coleridge, with whom he imagines having 'slow hung-up talks at midnight over mahogany tables in London'. References to Coleridge are actually rather rare in Ginsberg's work. The most notable reference he makes to Coleridge elsewhere is his claim that his continued retelling of the story of his Blake vision made him akin to Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, with the Blake vision having become his own personal albatross. See for example the *Paris Review* interview (*Spontaneous Prose*, p. 35).

The poem's Romantic influences are highlighted most explicitly in the third stanza, which describes Ginsberg's visit to Tintern Abbey:

Remember 160 miles from London's symmetrical thorned tower
 & network of TV pictures flashing bearded your Self
 the lambs on the tree-nooked hillside this day bleating
 heard in Blake's old ear, & the silent thought of Wordsworth in eld
 Stillness
 clouds passing through skeleton arches of Tintern Abbey—

⁴⁸ Turner painted both Tintern Abbey and Llanthony Priory, and Ginsberg's description of 'clouds passing through skeleton arches of Tintern Abbey' is in some ways more reminiscent of Turner than Wordsworth, whose poem does not in fact feature the abbey itself except in the title. A poetic fragment in Ginsberg's 1963 journal makes an apposite comparison between Blake and Landor (who lived at Llanthony Priory): 'Not to sup with Landor [...] / but see the eyes of Blake. / Blake my Guru' (*Indian Journals: March 1962-May 1963* [San Francisco: Dave Haselwood/City Lights, 1970], p. 153.) Ginsberg also refers to Llanthony Valley's later association with Eric Gill's 'arts commune' in the notes to 'Wales Visitation' in *Collected Poems* (p. 792), while Ginsberg himself features in Iain Sinclair's novel *Landor's Tower* (London: Granta, 2001), alongside Landor, Gill and others.

Bard Nameless as the Vast, babble to Vastness!⁴⁹

Edward Larrissy uses this reference to ‘lambs [...] heard in Blake’s old ear’ to back up his claim that the visit to Tintern made Ginsberg ‘think principally of Blake’; Larrissy clearly sees Blake’s intrusion into this stanza as problematic given Tintern’s more obvious links to Wordsworth.⁵⁰ However, given that the ‘lambs [...] heard in Blake’s old ear’ are immediately followed by ‘the silent thought of Wordsworth’, and that Ginsberg himself later described ‘Wales Visitation’ as his ‘first great big Wordsworthian nature poem’,⁵¹ we might conclude that Larrissy’s assessment of the poem is a little too hasty, following a pattern common in Blake criticism of privileging the influence of Blake on the Sixties at the expense of the other Romantics. At the same time however, the basic question of what exactly Blake is doing (both in terms of presence and function) in the very geographically specific Welsh landscapes of ‘Wales Visitation’ is quite legitimate; after all, unlike Wordsworth, Blake never set foot outside the confines of what is now Greater London, except for his brief residence on the Sussex coast.

In part of course, Blake enters into the poem almost automatically; Ginsberg’s immersion in Blake’s poetry was such that it was natural for the sound of Welsh lambs bleating to make him think of Blake’s biblically inspired lambs. The perhaps more unexpected traces of Blake’s ‘tygers’ can also be discovered in the poem, especially in the earlier version published as *Wales – A Visitation*, which has the line, ‘I knelt before the thistle, Blake’s Tiger / a tiny symmetry like hands interknit’. As Ginsberg himself pointed out, traces of Blake’s ‘fearful symmetry’ can still be detected in the later version of the line, which refers to ‘the satanic thistle that raises its horned symmetry’.⁵² While this later version removes the explicit reference to Blake and his tiger, the addition of the word ‘satanic’ simultaneously broadens the Blakean resonances; meanwhile the trope of Blakean symmetry is continued in the next stanza’s description of the Post Office tower as ‘London’s symmetrical thorned tower’.

Ginsberg also places the poem in Blake’s orbit through his adoption of the role of ‘Bard Nameless as the Vast’, and his direction to his ‘Bardic’ self to ‘tell naught / but

⁴⁹ Unless otherwise stated, I quote the version of ‘Wales Visitation’ in *Collected Poems*. This has minor differences to the version published in *Planet News* (1968), but also major differences to the earlier draft (which Ginsberg claimed to have composed while still high on LSD) published in pamphlet form as *Wales – A Visitation* (London: Cape Golliard Press, 1968).

⁵⁰ Edward Larrissy, *Blake and Modern Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 122-3.

⁵¹ Jane Kramer, *Paterfamilias: Allen Ginsberg in America* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1970), p. 22.

⁵² ‘Letter to Thom Gunn, 21 September 1989’, in *The Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, p. 431.

what seen by one man in a vale in Albion'. This echoes Blake's 'Introduction' to *Songs of Experience* ('Hear the voice of the Bard! / Who Present, Past, & Future sees'), in which Blake takes on the role of bardic narrator of the rest of the volume. However, the ancient bards of Britain also play an important role in the Albion myth of Blake's later prophetic books (see for example the 'Bard's song' of the first section of *Milton*), as well as featuring in a number of Blake's paintings and prints. I want to suggest now that the complex historical and emotional associations of Blake's bards – including their links to the problematic nationalism of Blake's Albion myth – continue to resonate in Ginsberg's poem, and that Ginsberg thus contributes to a broader Sixties tradition of radical antiquarianism which has parallels with the practices of Blake's own time.

As Jason Whittaker and others have shown, Blake's use of the figure of the bard is intimately linked to the wider antiquarian movement of the eighteenth century, which encompassed not only William Stukeley's investigations of ancient monuments and Jacob Bryant's mythography (both important influences on Blake's own myth-making), but also literary works such as Thomas Gray's poem 'The Bard' (first published 1757, and later illustrated by Blake) and James Macpherson's supposedly ancient 'Ossian' cycle (the authenticity of which Blake seems to have believed in).⁵³ Moreover, the potential for the figure of the bard to contribute to a discourse of patriotic nationalism within Blake's myth of Albion is apparent from Whittaker's conclusion that throughout the eighteenth century, 'the bard became a focus for patriotic aspirations, combining roles of historian and prophet, fighter for liberty and inspired poet in communication with nature and the national memory.'⁵⁴

Significantly however, the eighteenth-century role given to the bard as a 'fighter for liberty' also indicates the potential for more politically radical elements to exist within the naturally conservative confines of the antiquarian movement. Thus Jon Mee locates Blake within 'a version of antiquarianism which looks beyond the nostalgia of Gray to the rhetorical appeals of radicals like Paine to notions of primitive liberty and equality'; this radical antiquarianism 'sought to reimport antique virtue into the material circumstances of the 1790s.'⁵⁵ It is not hard to link what Mee characterizes as Blake's

⁵³ 'I Believe both Macpherson & Chatterton, that what they say is Ancient, Is so [...] I own myself an admirer of Ossian equally with any other Poet' ('Annotations to Wordsworth', E665-6).

⁵⁴ Whittaker, *William Blake and the Myths of Britain*, p. 99.

⁵⁵ Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 111.

vision of ‘a primitive bardic utopia’⁵⁶ with Ginsberg’s own bardic visions in ‘Wales Visitation’.

Ginsberg’s invocation of the figure of the bard in ‘Wales Visitation’ is also of course a consequence of the more geographically specific associations between bards and Wales. Blake himself gives Wales, and its bardic tradition, several meanings within his larger myth of Albion. On plate 39 of *Milton*, he sets out in detail the physical correspondences between the body parts of the giant Albion and various locations in Britain, in effect plotting the giant figure onto the landscape. In this schema, Wales represents Albion’s right hand:

His right foot stretches to the sea on Dovers cliffs, his heel
On Canterburys ruins; his right hand covers lofty Wales
His left Scotland[.]

(M 39:40-42, E141)

S. Foster Damon, in his *Blake Dictionary* (a work Ginsberg was himself very familiar with, as we saw in Chapter One), suggests that in Blake’s visual art the right hand is generally associated with the ‘spiritual’ and the left with the ‘materialistic’ side of human nature. However, even Damon himself, one of the great ‘systematizers’ of Blake’s works, is careful not to apply this left/right schematization too rigidly, especially with regard to Blake’s poetry.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, Blake’s association of Wales with Albion’s hand, the part of the body used to write or draw, does seem significant given Blake’s interest in the poetic practice of the Welsh bards, suggesting that Wales is figured here as a centre of creativity.

Wales and its bards also have other associations in Blake’s Albion myth. In *The Four Zoas*, Blake suggests that Mount Snowdon is the home of those Eternals who pre-existed Albion and were therefore not subject to the division or fall of Albion (FZ 21, E310-11). In this, he is drawing not only on heretical Christian and Jewish traditions concerning a pre-Adamite race, but also on the mythological commonplace that gods reside on mountains, whether Olympus, the Himalayas, or in this case Snowdon. However, Blake’s most significant alignment of Wales, its bards, and his own multi-faceted myth of Albion occurs in the *Descriptive Catalogue* that he produced for his ill-fated exhibition of 1809, where he describes an extremely large painting, now lost,

⁵⁶ Mee, p. 110.

⁵⁷ S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2013 [first pub. 1965]), pp. 173-4.

entitled 'The Ancient Britons'.⁵⁸ This depicted the three survivors of 'the last Battle of King Arthur', whom Blake allegorizes as 'the Strongest Man, the Beautifullest Man, and the Ugliest Man', who 'shall arise again with tenfold splendor when Arthur shall awake from sleep, and resume his dominion over earth and ocean' (E542).

As Blake's description of this painting continues, the syncretic method of his mythmaking becomes apparent, as he takes the legends of King Arthur and the ancient history of Britain and combines them firstly with the Bible, and then with his own myth of Albion as the Eternal Man. Blake explains that 'Adam was a Druid, and Noah; also Abraham was called to succeed the Druidical age [...] All these things are written in Eden. The artist is an inhabitant of that happy country' (E542-3). He then explains that he has also written 'under inspiration', but not yet published, a 'voluminous' work which 'contains the ancient history of Britain, and the world of Satan and of Adam.' This, presumably, is *Jerusalem*. Having linked the ancient Britain of the bards and druids with the Bible, Blake makes a further link to his myth of Albion. According to the *Catalogue*, the three survivors of 'the last Battle' depicted in the painting are also representatives of the race of Eternals who dwell 'in the Welch Mountains', as described in *The Four Zoas*. Blake then expands the boundaries of his all-encompassing mythography even further to include the work of Thomas Gray; according to Blake, the Eternals or survivors 'are there now, Gray saw them in the person of his bard on Snowdon'. Finally, he directly states what we may already have guessed (although the original readers of the *Catalogue* probably did not), that the figure of King Arthur, who 'shall awake from sleep, and resume his dominion over earth and ocean', shares his identity with Albion himself, fallen into sleep and division: 'The stories of Arthur are the acts of Albion, applied to a Prince of the fifth century' (E543).

Whether or not Ginsberg had already read Blake's *Four Zoas* or his *Descriptive Catalogue* by 1967, these texts suggest that (contrary to the suggestion of Larrissy) Blake had indeed earned his place in the geography of 'Wales Visitation' just as Wordsworth had; Ginsberg's trip to Llanthony Valley in the Black Mountains was just as much a Blakean pilgrimage as his visit to the gentler landscape of the Wye Valley was a Wordsworthian one.

⁵⁸ In his 'Advertisement of the Exhibition', Blake claims that the three main figures in the painting were 'full as large as Life' (E526); this is quite possible, if the painting measured 14 feet by 10 feet as Bentley suggests (*Stranger from Paradise*, p. 326).

Furthermore, if Blake's interest in the geography and bardic traditions of Wales was partly inspired by the discourses of eighteenth-century antiquarianism, within which he staged his own radical mythographic interventions, so too apparently was Ginsberg's. According to Ginsberg himself, his poem uses the word 'Visitation' in a highly specific sense, drawn from his own research into the history of the Welsh bards:

I call it a 'Visitation' because, in the old days, the bards, the Welsh bards, or travelling poets, used to go on what they called Visitations, from town to town, rhyming the gossip. So this is, like, the gossip of my own mind, on a foggy day, high in a valley in Wales.⁵⁹

Ginsberg seems to be referring to the old Welsh tradition of the 'clera' or bardic circuit, in which itinerant bards carried out a semi-official function as collectors of historical information, not only 'rhyming the gossip', but also recording genealogies and pedigrees of local families. The major extant sources for information on such bardic traditions are eighteenth-century antiquarian texts such as Edward Jones's *Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards* (1794):

The ancient Bards had a [...] visitation, to make once every three years [...] at which perambulation they collected all the memorable things that were done and fell out in every country that concerned their profession to make notice of, and wrote them down, so that they could not be ignorant of any memorable acts, the death of any great person, his descent, division or portion of lands, coat of arms, and children, in any country within their district.⁶⁰

Ginsberg, in placing his own tour of the Wye and Llanthony Valleys within this particular bardic tradition, is therefore like Blake performing a radical revision of eighteenth-century antiquarianism. While Blake integrates the Welsh bardic traditions investigated by the antiquarians into his own myth of Albion, Ginsberg sees himself as a

⁵⁹ 'Library of Congress reading', transcribed at the *Allen Ginsberg Project* site <<http://ginsbergblog.blogspot.co.uk/2011/09/library-of-congress-reading-asv-16.html>> [accessed 3 May 2014].

⁶⁰ Edward Jones, *Musical and Poetical Relicks of the Welsh Bards: Preserved, by Tradition and Authentic Manuscripts, from Very Remote Antiquity* (London: 1794), p. 57. The OED definition of 'visitation' which comes closest to this is I.1.c: 'A periodic visit made to a district by heralds to examine and enrol arms and pedigrees.' However, a range of other definitions of 'visitation' are also clearly applicable to Ginsberg's poem, including not only the more prosaic meaning of a visit to a place or person, but also OED I.1: 'The action [...] of going to a particular place in order to make an inspection and satisfy himself that everything is in order' (Ginsberg finds 'No imperfection in the budded mountain, / [...] no imperfection in the grass'), and OED II.9: 'The fact of some immaterial power or influence acting or operating on the mind', for which the OED gives examples from Shelley and Emerson. See *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'visitation, n.' <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223964>> [accessed 10 May 2014].

‘Bard Nameless as the Vast’, ‘rhyming the gossip’ of his mind, ‘high [on LSD] in a valley in Wales’.

Ginsberg therefore mixes the bard’s more mundane role as rhymer of ‘gossip’ (whether internal or external) with the grander prophetic role traditionally attributed to the bard. In so doing, he is also suggesting that the key to a monistic understanding of ‘Vastness’ (which I will suggest later is equivalent to Wordsworth and Coleridge’s concept of the ‘One Life’) lies in Blake’s instruction to ‘Labour well the Minute Particulars’ (J 55:51, E205). Thus at the end of ‘Wales Visitation’ Ginsberg asks, ‘What did I notice? Particulars! The / vision of the great One is myriad’. Significantly, this line immediately follows a Blakean vision of ‘All Albion one’, a line that suggests not only the spiritual unity of the British landscape of Albion, but also the reunification of Blake’s divided Eternal Man. As we will see, this insistence that the ‘vision of the great One is myriad’ is also key to the poem’s philosophical interaction with Wordsworth’s ‘Tintern Abbey’.

‘Bliss was it in that dawn ...’

If Ginsberg’s placing of Blake within the Wordsworthian geography of ‘Wales Visitation’ seems at first incongruous, then the presence of Wordsworth within Ginsberg’s poem is also problematic, for reasons both political and philosophical, despite the geographical appropriateness of the setting.

Wordsworth’s dramatic shift from youthful radicalism to later political and religious conservatism gave him a rather more ambivalent status than Blake within Sixties counterculture. Like Shelley before them, many Sixties radicals were unable to read Wordsworth without thinking of his later desertion of the radical cause.⁶¹ In a series of lectures Ginsberg gave in 1976, he discussed this very topic, moving from a reading of ‘Tintern Abbey’ to Wordsworth’s ‘Sonnet upon the Punishment of Death’ (1841), which Ginsberg described as ‘a final horror [...] to be seen clearly, rather than avoided’.⁶² However, Ginsberg also sought to offer a more nuanced view of Wordsworth’s conservatism, making an apt comparison with the path towards conservatism later taken by many Sixties radicals themselves:

⁶¹ See Shelley’s ‘To Wordsworth’ (1816).

⁶² Lecture transcribed at *Allen Ginsberg Project*

<<http://ginsbergblog.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/spontaneous-poetics-wordsworth-5.html>> [accessed 5 May 2014].

I was thinking of these poems in relation to our own national supposed disillusionment with the Sixties, and I'm giving Wordsworth now as a little sample of what kind of mind we might develop (maybe for good or ill). Or it's parallel to the same tradition of all the ex-Communists in the Thirties, who got to be anti-Stalinist, and were totally disillusioned with revolutionary Russian Communism, and joined the CIA, and became war-mongers and monsters, in a mirror image of Stalin.⁶³

As Ginsberg suggests, despite Wordsworth's eventual embrace of conservatism, his poetry had an important presence within Sixties counterculture. His famous reminiscence of the French Revolution – 'Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very Heaven' – has often been used in relation to the Sixties, including by Ginsberg himself.⁶⁴ In Europe, countercultural quotations of this line from *The Prelude* carry the weight of more specific associations between the events of 1789 and 1968 in France. Meanwhile, evidence of the popular appeal of Wordsworth within British counterculture is provided by the fact that when Ginsberg composed 'Wales Visitation' in 1967, he was not the only countercultural figure to be using 'Tintern Abbey' as a source of creative inspiration; the same year, a short-lived but well-regarded British psychedelic rock group were formed who called themselves Tintern Abbey, apparently taking their name not from the ruin itself, but from Wordsworth's poem.⁶⁵

As we have already seen, soon after writing 'Wales Visitation', Ginsberg explicitly acknowledged Wordsworth as the poem's primary poetic influence, referring

⁶³ Lecture transcribed at *Allen Ginsberg Project*

<<http://ginsbergblog.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/spontaneous-poetics-116-wordsworth-2.html>> [accessed 5 May 2014]. Ginsberg continued this theme in the next class, again sympathetically seeking to place Wordsworth's conservatism in context: 'What I'm trying to do is point out how similar the problems we have now [1976] are to those of disillusionment, change of mind, adaption to reality, that Wordsworth had to deal with' (<<http://ginsbergblog.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/spontaneous-poetics-119-wordsworth-6.html>> [accessed 6 May 2014]).

⁶⁴ In a 1981 Naropa lecture, Ginsberg quotes these lines from *The Prelude* (1805 text, X. 692-3) and explains 'there are rare moments like that where everybody feels it. It is a definite thing that happens in a revolution, where everybody feels liberated [...] and the light is going to shine.' Audio archived at <http://www.archive.org/details/Allen_Ginsberg_Class_19th_Century_Poetry_part_11_October_1981_81_P168> [accessed 11 August 2011.] For a further example of the use of these lines in relation to the Sixties, see Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (1977; repr. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), p. 269n. Dickstein also makes a further comparison between his experience of 1968 and Wordsworth's description of how post-revolutionary Europe 'thrilled with joy, / France standing on the top of golden hours, / And human nature seeming born again' (*The Prelude*, 1850 text, VI. 339-341).

⁶⁵ See Simon Reynolds, 'Back to Eden: Innocence, Indolence and Pastoralism in Psychedelic Music, 1966-1996', in *Psychodelia Britannica: Hallucinogenic Drugs in Britain*, ed. by Antonio Melechi (London: Turnaround, 1997), pp. 143-165 (pp. 147-8).

to 'Wales Visitation' as his 'first great big Wordsworthian nature poem'.⁶⁶ Ginsberg's claim is substantiated by the natural imagery and tone of the opening stanza:

White fog lifting & falling on mountain-brow
 Trees moving in rivers of wind
 The clouds arise
 as on a wave, gigantic eddy lifting mist
 above teeming ferns exquisitely swayed
 along a green crag
 glimpsed thru mullioned glass in valley raine—

However, Ginsberg's somewhat glib characterization of his own poem actually plays down the depth and specificity of its Wordsworthian heritage. I want to suggest that 'Wales Visitation' demands to be read not simply as 'Wordsworthian nature poetry', but as a sustained response to the poem with which it shares such a strong geographical connection, 'Tintern Abbey'. Furthermore, I want to argue that the intertextual relationship between these two poems is not limited to their shared focus on the same Welsh landscape; Ginsberg also engages with Wordsworth's themes of selfhood, memory and vision. Most importantly however, the two poems embody a shared set of characteristically Wordsworthian tensions which result from their urge to permanently record and memorialize the fleeting moments of epiphany and spiritual insight felt by their authors. Like Wordsworth's shifting political sympathies, such poetic tensions can be figured in terms of a conflict between radicalism and conservatism that is present both within Romanticism itself and also within the Sixties.

'a sense sublime'

Both 'Tintern Abbey' and 'Wales Visitation' are constructed around descriptions of epiphanies. At the heart of Wordsworth's poem is the description of

[...] a sense sublime
 Of something far more deeply interfused,
 Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean, and the living air,
 And the blue sky, and in the mind of man,
 A motion and a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things.

(96-103)

⁶⁶ Kramer, p. 22.

It is clear that Ginsberg attached great importance not only to ‘Tintern Abbey’ but to these lines in particular, because he quoted them in two major interviews which focused on his own poetic influences and techniques. In the *Paris Review* interview, conducted two years before the composition of ‘Wales Visitation’, he explained his belief that Wordsworth’s description of the ‘sense sublime’ ‘is characteristic of all high poetry. [...] I began seeing poetry as the communication of [...] not just any experience but *this* experience.’⁶⁷ In the 1970 ‘Craft Interview’, referring to the same lines from ‘Tintern Abbey’, Ginsberg claimed, ‘[t]hat kind of poetry influenced me: a long breath poetry that has a sort of ecstatic climax.’⁶⁸ It is unsurprising therefore that Wordsworth’s great description of the spiritual interconnectedness of nature and ‘the mind of man’ should be reflected in ‘Wales Visitation’, Ginsberg’s most obviously Wordsworthian poem.

In the poem’s second stanza Ginsberg calls on his own bardic self to tell of how

[...] physical sciences end in Ecology,
the wisdom of earthly relations,
of mouths & eyes interknit ten centuries visible
orchards of mind language manifest human,
of the satanic thistle that raises its horned symmetry
flowering above sister grass-daisies’ pink tiny
bloomlets angelic as lightbulbs[.]

These lines reflect several different influences. As we have already seen, Ginsberg himself later drew attention to the presence of Blake in ‘the satanic thistle that raises its horned symmetry’. Meanwhile, the reference to ‘Ecology, / the wisdom of earthly relations’ suggests the influence of Gregory Bateson, whose talk on ‘Ecological Destruction by Technology’ had had a profound effect on Ginsberg a few days earlier when they were fellow participants in the ‘Dialectics of Liberation’ conference in London.⁶⁹ Michael Schumacher suggests that Bateson (a figure whose interdisciplinary work spanned a range of Sixties interests from ecology to psychotherapy) was a major influence on ‘Wales Visitation’ as a whole, and certainly the poem’s concern with the connection between mind and nature, particularly apparent in the stanza quoted above,

⁶⁷ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 41 (emphasis in original). It is also significant that this particular discussion of Wordsworth’s poem occurs in the context of Ginsberg’s definitive explanation of his ‘Blake vision’.

⁶⁸ Mary Jane Fortunato, Lucille Medwick, and Susan Rowe, ‘Craft Interview with Allen Ginsberg’, *New York Quarterly* (Spring 1971), rpt. in *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 246.

⁶⁹ Michael Schumacher, *Dharma Lion: A Biography of Allen Ginsberg* (New York: St Martin’s, 1992), p. 485.

fits with Bateson's research in this area.⁷⁰ However, as Jonathan Bate has shown, Bateson's interest in consciousness and ecology was itself influenced by Romantic poetry. In *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991), Bate examines the influence of Wordsworth on Bateson's 'belief that the future of humankind may well be dependent on the rekindling of a sense of divine immanence in nature'.⁷¹ Thus just as Blakean Romanticism is infused in many different areas of Sixties culture, so too is Wordsworthian Romanticism; Wordsworth's influence on 'Wales Visitation' can be seen to operate both directly and indirectly. Finally, it is also significant that it was Bateson who was responsible for giving Ginsberg his first dose of LSD in 1959.⁷² The multiple influences on 'Wales Visitation', of Blake, Wordsworth, Bateson, the natural landscape of Wales, and LSD, are thus fundamentally interconnected; this is also of course the message of the poem itself.⁷³

The theme of the connection between nature and mind is also apparent in Ginsberg's description, in the stanza just quoted, of 'orchards of mind language'. That this line has a direct link to Wordsworth's poem is apparent from a 1975 Naropa lecture in which Ginsberg discusses 'Tintern Abbey', focusing particularly on lines 11-18, which describe 'these orchard-tufts, / Which [...] / Among the woods and copses lose themselves, / [...] these pastoral farms / Green to the very door.' Ginsberg comments, "'Green to the very door" tells you a whole history of that land – orchards of mind language cultivated for centuries'. Thus, without ever mentioning 'Wales Visitation' by name, Ginsberg merges his own poem with Wordsworth's.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Schumacher, p. 486.

⁷¹ Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 83.

⁷² Schumacher, p. 311.

⁷³ There is much more to be said about the relationship between the Romantic poets, the modern environmental movement, and ecocritical literary theory. While Bate's *Romantic Ecology* is mostly focused on Wordsworth, other critics have examined Blake in this context. See for example the chapter 'Blake's Deep Ecology, or the Ethos of Otherness', in Mark Lussier, *Romantic Dynamics: The Poetics of Physicality* (Basingstoke: Macmillan / New York: St Martin's, 2000), pp. 47-63, and Troy Patenaude, "'nourished by the spirits of forests and floods": Blake, Nature and Modern Environmentalism', in *Re-envisioning Blake*, ed. by Mark Crosby, Troy Patenaude and Angus Whitehead (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 180-206.

⁷⁴ 'History of Poetry' lecture, transcribed at *Allen Ginsberg Project*

<<http://allenginsberg.org/#!/archive/lecture/history-of-poetry-15-wordsworth?id=52545c26617d3a3b21000038>> [accessed 10 May 2014]. In another lecture on Wordsworth the following year, Ginsberg again makes an implicit connection between the same sections of the two poems: 'I've been in Wales ... and cultivated farms are still "green to the very door". It's something that is like an interweaving of mouths and minds and fields for centuries and centuries of awareness.' (Compare 'Wales Visitation': 'mouths & eyes interknit ten centuries visible / orchards of mind language manifest human'.) <<http://ginsbergblog.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/spontaneous-poetics-115-wordsworth-1.html>> [accessed 10 May 2014]

More generally, Wordsworth's description of how the personified 'orchard-tufts [...] / Among the woods and copses lose themselves' reflects the characteristically Wordsworthian way in which, in both 'Tintern Abbey' and 'Wales Visitation', the poet's individual consciousness is celebrated even as it dissolves and disappears into what Wordsworth and Coleridge termed the 'One Life'.⁷⁵ As we shall see, this problematic relationship between the separate self and the transcendent unity of the 'One Life' can be seen as lying at the heart of the two poems.

‘An ecologically attuned pantheistic nature trip’

‘Wales Visitation’ continually returns to variations of the image with which it opens, of ‘White fog lifting & falling on mountain-brow’. Ginsberg’s various descriptions of these clouds, which pass ‘through skeleton arches of Tintern Abbey’ as well as through the valleys of the Black Mountains, can be seen to echo several passages in Wordsworth’s ‘Tintern Abbey’. They are for example reminiscent of ‘the misty mountain winds’ which Wordsworth describes blowing against his sister Dorothy in line 137 of the poem. But more importantly, as they roll through Ginsberg’s poem and the landscape it describes, it becomes clear that these real clouds also figuratively echo Wordsworth’s ‘sense sublime’ which ‘rolls through all things’. This is particularly clear in ‘Wales Visitation’s’ fourth and fifth stanzas. In the fourth stanza, Ginsberg recalls how

All the Valley quivered, one extended motion, wind
undulating on mossy hills
a giant wash that sank white fog delicately down red runnels
on the mountainside
whose leaf-branch tendrils moved asway
in granitic undertow down—
and lifted the floating Nebulous upward, and lifted the arms of the trees
and lifted the grasses an instant in balance
and lifted the lambs to hold still
and lifted the green of the hill, in one solemn wave[.]

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
 And the round ocean, *and* the living air,
 And the blue sky, *and* in the mind of man,
 A motion *and* a spirit, that impels
 All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
 And rolls through all things.

(98-103; emphasis added)

The poets' shared use of polysyndeton emphasizes the pervasiveness of the spiritual force they describe, but also reinforces their vision of the ultimate unity of 'all things', which are verbally held together by the continually repeated conjunction.

Furthermore, Wordsworth's personification of 'the living air' in this passage is mirrored by Ginsberg's personification of the valley, trees and wind. This continues in Ginsberg's fifth stanza, which makes more explicit the latent pantheism implied in the previous stanzas:

A solid mass of Heaven, mist-infused, ebbs thru the vale,
 a wavelet of Immensity, lapping gigantic through Llanthony Valley,
 the length of all England, valley upon valley under Heaven's ocean
 tonned with cloud-hang,
 –Heaven balanced on a grassblade.
 Roar of the mountain wind slow, sigh of the body,
 One Being on the mountainside stirring gently
 Exquisite scales trembling everywhere in balance,
 one motion thru the cloudy sky-floor shifting on the million feet of daisies,
 one Majesty the motion that stirred wet grass quivering
 to the farthest tendril of white fog poured down
 through shivering flowers on the mountain's head–

Despite the Blakean reference to 'Heaven balanced on a grassblade',⁷⁶ this is the most obviously Wordsworthian section of the poem. Wordsworth's formulation 'A motion and a spirit' is for example echoed in Ginsberg's references to 'one motion' and 'one Majesty the motion', while Ginsberg's 'One Being on the mountainside' clearly parallels Wordsworth and Coleridge's pantheistic concept of the One Life.

Ginsberg specifically acknowledged the Romantic pantheism of 'Wales Visitation', later describing the poem as an 'ecologically attuned pantheistic nature

⁷⁶ Or rather Blakean-Yeatsian, as it combines elements of Blake's 'Auguries of Innocence' ('To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower') with Yeats's 'Gratitude to the Unknown Instructors' ('All things hang like a drop of dew / Upon a blade of grass'), itself clearly based on Blake's poem. Ginsberg quotes Yeats's poem in his lecture 'Eternity (Blake/Poetry Class: Kent State, April 7, 1971)', in *Allen Verbatim*, pp. 15-23 (p. 18).

trip’,⁷⁷ but this aspect of the poem can also be seen as problematic. It has long been recognized in Romantic scholarship that there is a problematic relationship between Wordsworth’s early pantheism and his later Christian orthodoxy; I want to suggest that this religious tension is also mirrored in Ginsberg’s poem.

In Ginsberg’s case, the established religion that complicates his poem’s pantheist sentiments is neither Wordsworth’s Christianity nor the Judaism of Ginsberg’s own heritage, but rather his adopted religion of Buddhism. Although Ginsberg did not take formal Buddhist refuge vows until 1972, Buddhism had been an increasingly powerful presence in his poetry since the early 1960s; the Buddhist aspect of ‘Wales Visitation’ is apparent not only in specific references such as ‘each flower Buddha-eye’, but also in the loving, attentive awareness of the self and the universe with which the poem is infused. However, the poem’s personification and apparently theistic sacralization of the Welsh landscape seem at odds with the non-theistic perspective of Buddhism.

This issue can be linked to the criticisms Terence Diggory makes of ‘Wales Visitation’ in his article ‘Allen Ginsberg’s Urban Pastoral’, where he argues that ‘Wales Visitation’ sits uncomfortably with the other Ginsberg poems of the mid- to late Sixties which together constitute a longer ‘Poem of These States’.⁷⁸ According to Diggory, ‘Wales Visitation’ is unique not only within this sequence but even ‘within Ginsberg’s total oeuvre, because it is almost pure pastoral in the traditional sense and apparently without irony.’⁷⁹ This, Diggory suggests, represents an essentially conservative regression from the radical truth of emptiness that Ginsberg confronted a year earlier in ‘Iron Horse’, where he stated that ‘All landscapes have become a Phantom’. Furthermore, in adopting the mantle of ‘Bard Nameless as the Vast’, the poet only ‘pretends to reject the name of Ginsberg’. In fact ‘Ginsberg is lying to himself. By the terms he acknowledges in “Iron Horse”, the Nameless condition he assumes at the beginning of “Wales Visitation” could be followed by no images, pastoral or otherwise.’⁸⁰ This represents a perceptive diagnosis of some of the ways in which ‘Wales Visitation’ is problematic, although I want to suggest that to couch the contradictory notions of selfhood presented in the third stanza in terms of pretence and

⁷⁷ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 256.

⁷⁸ Terence Diggory, ‘Allen Ginsberg’s Urban Pastoral’, in *The Beat Generation: Critical Essays*, ed. Kostas Myrsiades (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), pp. 201-218.

⁷⁹ Diggory, p. 214.

⁸⁰ Diggory, p. 214.

‘lying’, as Diggory does, fails to take into account the effect of the poem’s Romantic influences.

Other documents which date from the days immediately before and after Ginsberg’s visit to Wales indicate that during this period he was very consciously attempting to explore the ironies and illusions inherent in presentations of the self, especially the ‘TV pictures flashing bearded your Self’ that were transmitted from ‘London’s symmetrical thorned tower’. Such contemporary intertexts for ‘Wales Visitation’ include Iain Sinclair’s documentary *Ah! Sunflower* (1967) and accompanying *Kodak Mantra Diaries* (1971),⁸¹ and also the speech Ginsberg made at the Dialectics of Liberation conference, where he explicitly acknowledged the fundamentally illusory nature of ‘the aesthetic experience, the religious experience, the peak experience, the mystical experience, the art experience, identity experience, unitive experience of One, of all of us being one [...] also one with flowers, also the very trees and plants.’⁸² From the perspective of Buddhism, Ginsberg’s impulse to celebrate this Romantic ideal of unity while at the same time recognizing its fundamentally illusory nature is not in itself problematic. However, while ‘Wales Visitation’ occasionally hints at such a deliberate staging of contradictions (for example in the different versions of selfhood presented in the third stanza) it is the celebratory impulse that predominates, to the extent that the visionary mode does indeed become problematically concretized.

Somewhat surprisingly, given the way his argument revolves around Ginsberg’s understanding of the illusory nature of selfhood and the universe, Diggory’s article never explicitly links such concepts to Ginsberg’s Buddhism. Furthermore, although he makes interesting use of Blake, Diggory does not examine Wordsworth’s pantheistic influence on the ‘pure pastoral’ of ‘Wales Visitation’. In ignoring the influence of Wordsworth, Diggory not only misses an essential aspect of the poem’s contradictions, but also an opportunity to explore the reason why such arise.

⁸¹ Iain Sinclair, *The Kodak Mantra Diaries* (1971, republished as *Beat Scene* special issue, 2006). Sinclair’s novel *Landor’s Tower* (2001) also contains further insights into Ginsberg’s activities in Wales and London during this period.

⁸² Allen Ginsberg, ‘Consciousness and Practical Action’, in *Counter Culture*, ed. by Joseph Berke (London: Peter Owen, 1969), pp. 170-181. An edited and expanded version of the same speech was published as ‘A Speech: Dialectics of Liberation’, in *The Digger Papers* (1968), pp. 4-7
<<http://www.diggers.org/digpaps68/dialib.html>> [accessed 10 May 2014].

‘food / For future years’

If, as I have been arguing, ‘Wales Visitation’ is a neo-Romantic response to Wordsworth’s ‘Tintern Abbey’, it is important to also see the poem’s problems in this light. Just as Wordsworth’s poem celebrates an epiphanic moment, ‘a sense sublime / Of something far more deeply interfused’, Ginsberg’s poem can be seen to represent one long epiphanic moment which encompasses both his LSD trip in Llanthony Valley and the earlier sight of ‘clouds passing through skeleton arches of Tintern Abbey’.

However, the two poems are linked by the way in which the poets actively try to turn their epiphanies into memory even as they experience them. Ginsberg commands his bardic self to ‘Remember [...] the lambs on the tree-nooked hillside this day bleating’ and the ‘clouds passing through skeleton arches of Tintern Abbey’, while Wordsworth writes of standing amidst the natural beauty of the Wye Valley

[...] not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years.

(63-66)

In producing the canonical text that is ‘Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey’, Wordsworth captured his brief moment of epiphany so successfully that the moment provides ‘life and food’ not only for his own ‘future years’ but also for future generations, including Ginsberg himself.⁸³ In both poems, this conscious saving up of memories can be seen as problematic, as it seems to undermine the very foundations of the poets’ epiphanies, which are based on a sense of the self dissolving into oneness with nature and all humanity (the One Life), apparently only accessible during a meditative experience of being in the present moment. When the conscious mind is actively (and somewhat materialistically) saving up the experience as ‘food / For future years’, then this risks destroying the spontaneous epiphanic awareness at the very moment that the poet himself is experiencing it.

This is of course also reminiscent of Ginsberg’s earlier attempts to hold on to and recapture the essence of his ‘Blake vision’, an approach which Ginsberg had supposedly abandoned four years previously when he wrote ‘The Change’. As he explained in the *Paris Review* interview:

⁸³ As Matthew J. A. Green writes in the ‘Preface’ to *Romanticism* 15.1 (2009), an edition devoted to ‘Post-Romantic Identities’, ‘the claims upon futurity exercised by a surprising number of works from the period have come to be justified, though rarely in the manner anticipated by their authors’ (p. 16).

I had to cut myself off from the Blake vision and renounce it. Otherwise I'd be hung up on a memory of an experience. Which is not the actual awareness of now, now.⁸⁴

Ginsberg later suggested that the absence of paranoia in his Wales LSD trip was the result of his putting into practice the lesson he had learned in India from a Tibetan lama: 'If you see anything horrible, don't cling to it. And if you see anything beautiful, don't cling to it.'⁸⁵ This had already precipitated the major change in outlook recorded in 'The Change', but Ginsberg felt that the Wales trip was the first time he had been able to fully put this into practice during an experience with psychedelics. It is therefore somewhat paradoxical that 'Wales Visitation' should embody a Wordsworthian approach to the visionary which emphasises the recording and poetic revision of epiphanic experience, especially when, as Diggory suggests, other poems from the same period such as 'Wichita Vortex Sutra' and 'Iron Horse' take a very different approach to the pastoral genre, an approach we can identify as less Wordsworthian, more postmodern, and also in some ways more Buddhist (although Diggory himself uses none of these terms). I do not however see 'Wales Visitation' as an example of Ginsberg 'lying to himself' as Diggory does, in part because the poem does seem to at least hint at an understanding of the Buddhist (and as we will see also Blakean) truths of non-self, even as it follows a primarily Wordsworthian model. Such are the complexities and tensions that exist within Ginsberg's Romanticism, and within the Romantic influence on the Sixties more generally.

The epiphanic description in 'Tintern Abbey' of the 'sense sublime' that 'rolls through all things' can of course be linked to similar passages in other Wordsworth poems, particularly the 'spots of time' sequence of *The Prelude*,⁸⁶ and the 'visionary gleam' described in the Immortality Ode. But just as in these other poems, in 'Tintern Abbey' the epiphanic moment is brief, and hard to recapture, hence the focus of all these poems on memory. In contrast, Ginsberg's 'Wales Visitation', which describes the observations and sensations experienced during an LSD trip which lasted for at least five hours, stretches out the epiphanic moment for much of the poem.

⁸⁴ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 49.

⁸⁵ Paul Portugés, *The Visionary Poetics of Allen Ginsberg* (Santa Barbara: Ross-Erikson, 1978), pp. 118-9.

⁸⁶ *The Prelude* (1805 text), XI. 257-278.

It is thus a feature not only of 'Tintern Abbey', but of Wordsworth's poetry more generally that the visionary mode is caught between competing and ultimately contradictory impulses, towards the celebration of the self and the individual consciousness on the one hand, and towards a vision of transcendent unity on the other hand. The fundamental problem with this is encapsulated in Keats's phrase, 'the wordsworthian or egotistical sublime'.⁸⁷ The logic of Wordsworth and Coleridge's *One Life* ultimately requires that the self which is experiencing, memorializing and recording this visionary state should cease to exist, and dissolve into the transcendent unity of the *One Life*.

Wordsworth himself does not seem to directly address this philosophical paradox which lies at the centre of some of his most famous poetry, but as I will show, Ginsberg does approach this issue in a number of published essays and interviews, some dealing specifically with 'Wales Visitation', others dealing more generally with the problem of recording the transcendent sense of unity which Ginsberg also experienced at other times in his life. It was also an aspect of 'Tintern Abbey' that he recognized in his 1976 description of Wordsworth's poem as 'the best statement of that nineteenth-century ego-ism that Whitman [also] developed.'⁸⁸

As Ginsberg must also have been aware, the tension between memory and vision in Wordsworth's poetry had also been stridently critiqued by Blake; in annotations inscribed in his copy of Wordsworth's *Collected Poems* (1815), Blake wrote, 'Imagination is the Divine Vision [...] Imagination has nothing to do with Memory' (E666). Meanwhile, Blake's own *Milton* is in part a dramatization of the struggle between the faculties of memory and imaginative vision, a struggle which is explicitly linked to the dissolution of selfhood. Thus the character of Milton proclaims:

I will go down to self annihilation and eternal death,
Lest the Last Judgement come & find me unannihilate
And I be siez'd & giv'n into the hands of my own Selfhood [...]
With the daughters of memory, & not with the daughters of inspiration
(M 14:22-29, E108).

⁸⁷ 'Letter to Richard Woodhouse, 27 October 1818', in *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821*, ed. by Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), I, pp. 386-388 (p. 387).

⁸⁸ Lecture transcribed at <<http://ginsbergblog.blogspot.co.uk/2013/08/spontaneous-poetics-115-wordsworth-1.html>> [accessed 10 May 2014]. In another lecture, discussing Wordsworth's 'Intimations Ode', Ginsberg comments on the poem's 'clinging attitude towards [the visionary state], so it's a real nineteenth century Post-Industrial hung-up attitude.' <<http://allenginsberg.org/#!/archive/lecture/history-of-poetry-15-wordsworth?id=52545c26617d3a3b21000038>> [accessed 10 May 2014].

Blake's concept of 'self annihilation' is not of course a negative one, but rather, as Ginsberg realized, remarkably close to similar ideas within Buddhism. As Robert Essick and Joseph Viscomi explain,

Milton celebrates a form of self-annihilation that attempts to overcome the self-centredness that radically divides a single self or a community from all others and casts that other as the enemy. This is, however, not merely a criticism of an unsavory personality type, for Blake's critique of selfhood goes to the heart of Western metaphysics, the *cogito* of Descartes – 'I think, therefore I am' – that posits a unitary self as the basis of existence. It is an existence Blake wished to overcome and replace with a more fluid and open concept of being where the gulf between self and other is bridged – indeed, annihilated.⁸⁹

In combining Wordsworth's 'egotistical sublime' with the radical questioning of selfhood which Blake expresses directly but which Wordsworth shies away from (even as the logic of his poetry seems to demand it), Ginsberg's 'Wales Visitation' reveals a complex Romantic inheritance, whose tensions Ginsberg himself only partially explores.

Romanticism and the psychedelic sublime

Ginsberg often stresses the commonality of visionary experience between Blake, Wordsworth, and himself; in this context, he links the work of both Romantic poets with what are arguably the primary visionary tools of the Sixties, psychedelic drugs. Thus in a 1975 Naropa lecture, Ginsberg claimed that Wordsworth 'had visited Tintern Abbey and had some sort of psychedelic experience'.⁹⁰ Although he is obviously not suggesting that Wordsworth's experience was drug-inspired, Ginsberg's use of the word 'psychedelic' in this context is nonetheless significant, amounting to a claim that there are direct parallels between the experience that led Wordsworth to write 'Tintern Abbey' and his own LSD trip that inspired 'Wales Visitation'.

While Ginsberg made this comparison in front of like-minded students at the Naropa Institute which he himself had co-founded, he also made similar comparisons in much more public and even confrontational arenas. As a leading representative of the Sixties counterculture, Ginsberg was often called upon to publically discuss the effects

⁸⁹ 'Introduction', in William Blake, *Milton a Poem, and the Final Illuminated Works*, ed. by Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi (London: The William Blake Trust / The Tate Gallery, 1993), p. 12.

⁹⁰ 'History of Poetry lecture', transcribed at the *Allen Ginsberg Project* <<http://allenginsberg.org/#!/archive/lecture/history-of-poetry-15-wordsworth?id=52545c26617d3a3b21000038>> [accessed 11 May 2014].

of psychedelic drugs such as LSD and defend their use. Not only did Ginsberg make specific comparisons with Wordsworth's poetry, he often made the point that the epiphanic visions experienced during an LSD trip were just as 'natural' as those described by Wordsworth. Within months of composing 'Wales Visitation', Ginsberg read the poem in its entirety during a PBS television interview with conservative ideologue William Buckley, patiently (but also provocatively) explaining that it was 'written in Wales, high on LSD. Fifth hour of LSD for those who are specific technologists in this', before going on to claim that the LSD vision was 'a natural thing. I cited Blake and Wordsworth as having that natural vision'.⁹¹ By 1968, the linking of Blake with drugs had become a Sixties commonplace, despite the biographical evidence that Blake's 'habits were very temperate', extending to nothing stronger than a regular pint of beer with dinner (and that only towards the end of his life).⁹² It is therefore significant that Ginsberg frequently goes beyond this well-established Blakean psychedelic trope, to suggest links between Wordsworth's poetry and the psychedelic experience.

In another somewhat confrontational television interview conducted nearly three decades after his encounter with Buckley, Ginsberg again linked Wordsworth with psychedelics, explaining that 'the psychedelic experience, whether with peyote, or LSD, or psilocybin [...] might catalyze a very similar sense of infinity, or expansiveness, or "panoramic awareness" we call it, which you find in Wordsworth's "Sonnet on Westminster Bridge" or his moment on top, when he steps out of the mist in *The Prelude*'.⁹³ When the interviewer countered this by pointing out that Wordsworth never 'took drugs', Ginsberg adroitly pointed out that Wordsworth nonetheless lived within a drug culture, in which close friends such as Coleridge regularly took not only then common drugs such as laudanum or opium, but also experimented with newly discovered drugs such as laughing gas. Thus Ginsberg was able to draw implicit parallels between the drug cultures of Romanticism and the drug cultures of the Sixties, and position Wordsworth within a psychedelic context that encompassed both.⁹⁴

⁹¹ 'Interview with William F. Buckley, Jr (May 7, 1968)', in *Spontaneous Mind*, pp. 76-102 (p. 90).

⁹² Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake, 'Pictor Ignotus'* (London and Cambridge: Macmillan, 1863), I, p. 314.

⁹³ 'BBC Face to Face Interview, 1994' (transcript), *The Allen Ginsberg Project* website <<http://ginsbergblog.blogspot.co.uk/2011/11/bbc-face-to-face-interview-1994-asv21.html>> [accessed 5 February 2014].

⁹⁴ See also Ginsberg's discussion of the Romantic drug scene in the *Paris Review* interview (*Spontaneous Mind*, pp. 44-5).

While both of these television interviews took place after Ginsberg's composition of 'Wales Visitation', we can identify them as belonging within a series of public statements made by Ginsberg in similarly formal and even inquisitorial settings, in which he draws on Wordsworth to explain and justify the use of psychedelic drugs. Significantly, this trope dates back to before the 1967 LSD trip that inspired 'Wales Visitation'. In a remarkable testimony given during a special US Senate subcommittee hearing on drugs in 1966, Ginsberg described a recent LSD trip in which

I saw a friend dancing long haired before green waves, under cliffs of titanic nature that Wordsworth described in his poetry [...]. I accept the evidence of my own sense that, with psychedelics as catalysts, I have seen the world more deeply at specific times. And that has made me more peaceable.⁹⁵

Here Ginsberg not only explicitly equates his LSD vision with a Wordsworthian version of the sublime ('cliffs of titanic nature that Wordsworth described in his poetry'), but also follows this with what sounds very much like a paraphrased version of lines 48-50 of 'Tintern Abbey':

While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

The literariness of Ginsberg's testimony, with its direct and indirect allusions to Wordsworth, is in part a result of the fact that the testimony was carefully and deliberately composed in advance of his appearance. The passage quoted above is adapted, with only minor alterations, from a letter Ginsberg wrote to Charles Olson in October 1965, shortly after the trip it describes.⁹⁶ The comparisons between the LSD experience and Wordsworth's depictions of the One Life are also present in a short essay entitled 'A National Hallucination' which Ginsberg seems to have prepared as further evidence for his Senate appearance but which he left out of his actual testimony:

The mysterious LSD experience has never been clearly explained to those closed off from the experience by the door of choice. It is not *that*

⁹⁵ Allen Ginsberg, 'U. S. Senate Statement (June 14, 1966)', in *Deliberate Prose*, pp. 67-82 (pp. 72-73). For a fascinating analysis of the 'Buddhist poetics' of Ginsberg's Senate testimony, including the claim that it actually 'demonstrates the beginning of a break with romanticism for Ginsberg', see Tony Trigilio, *Allen Ginsberg's Buddhist Poetics* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), pp. 100-109.

⁹⁶ For the relevant part of this letter see Miles, p. 375.

mysterious. Here it is: like Wordsworth's descriptions of natural unity, like the breakdown to complete personal self during sexual communion[.]⁹⁷

Ginsberg's comparison here of 'Wordsworth's descriptions of natural unity' with his own LSD-inspired sense of unity clearly anticipates the composition, on LSD, of the Wordsworthian 'Wales Visitation' a year later. Furthermore, the additional comparison of both Wordsworthian and LSD-inspired visionary experiences to the breaking down of the personal self during 'sexual communion' is also reflected in 'Wales Visitation':

I lay down mixing my beard with the wet hair of the mountainside,
smelling the brown vagina-moist ground, harmless,
tasting the violet thistle-hair, sweetness—⁹⁸

The three-way comparison made in 'A National Hallucination' between sex, Wordsworth and LSD, reveals Ginsberg's awareness that the 'breakdown' of the self experienced 'during sexual communion' is also implicit in Wordsworth's philosophy of the One Life.

In such statements, Ginsberg makes it clear that he sees no essential difference between an LSD vision, his own non-drug induced 'Blake vision' of 1948, and the visionary experiences described by Wordsworth. However, he also makes it clear that all these experiences become problematic when one attempts to consciously hold on them, in memory or in poetry.⁹⁹ For Ginsberg, the paradigmatic example of this is of course his own 'Blake vision', which he spent fifteen years trying to recapture (not only through drug experimentation but also through his poetry), before his Buddhist-inspired realization in 1963 that such attachment was interfering with the visionary (and poetic) process itself:

I realized that to attain the depth of consciousness that I was seeking when I was talking about the Blake vision [...] I had to cut myself off from the Blake vision and renounce it. Otherwise I'd be hung up on a memory of an

⁹⁷ 'A National Hallucination', in *Deliberate Prose*, pp. 82-85 (p. 84).

⁹⁸ This passage is echoed in an August 1967 letter to Peter Orlovsky, in which (without mentioning that he has just written a poem about this experience), Ginsberg describes how 'I fell on moist grass, it smelled like sweet brown vagina, and sighed with pleasure' (*The Letters of Allen Ginsberg*, p. 334).

⁹⁹ See also for example the 1971 Kent State lecture in which Ginsberg explains how in the work of Wordsworth, Blake, Shelley, Yeats and William James, there is 'a psychedelic universal cosmic consciousness [...] of which the more you talk the farther it flies from you. [...] Unless you finally get to a point where [...] you're not chasing your own consciousness in order to cling to it' (*Allen Verbatim*, p. 18).

experience. [...] I'd have to give up this continual churning thought process of yearning back to a visionary state.¹⁰⁰

It is important to note that this renunciation of attachment to the 'Blake vision' did not put an end to Ginsberg's interest in either Blake or psychedelic drugs, nor even to his attempts to write poetry about his epiphanic experiences, as evidenced by the composition of 'Wales Visitation' itself in 1967. In fact, as Ginsberg explained to Paul Portugés in 1976, he felt that by unselfconsciously recording the details of his Wales experience, focusing especially on the physical details of the landscape, he had managed to overcome many of the problems he had always associated with recording visionary experience.¹⁰¹

Arguably however, some of the Romantic tensions discussed previously do remain in the poem. They are apparent in the poem's contradictory urges towards both celebrations of the self and celebrations of transcendent selfless unity, and also in the injunction in the third stanza to 'Remember' the events of that day. As I have argued, these tensions are characteristically Wordsworthian; Ginsberg's description of his own 'continual churning thought process of yearning back to a visionary state' perfectly characterizes the process dramatized in Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey', as well as in the Immortality Ode and sections of *The Prelude*.¹⁰²

'Emotion recollected in tranquillity' versus 'First Thought, Best Thought'

There is one further important and very deliberate echo of Wordsworth to be found, not in 'Wales Visitation' itself but in the paratextual prose matter associated with it. On the back cover of *Planet News* (1968), the collection within which 'Wales Visitation' was published, Ginsberg wrote a condensed summary of the poem and its influences:

[...] across Atlantic *Wales Visitation* promethian [sic] text recollected in emotion revised in tranquillity continuing tradition of ancient Nature Language mediates between psychedelic inspiration and humane ecology & integrates acid classic Unitive Vision with democratic eyeball particulars.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ *Spontaneous Mind*, p. 49.

¹⁰¹ See *The Visionary Poetics of Allen Ginsberg*, pp. 120-123.

¹⁰² Another interesting example of Ginsberg's experience of the tension between the direct experience of the sublime and Wordsworth's recording of it can be found in a July 1955 journal entry, where he describes how the 'sublime' cliffs and valleys of the Yosemite inspired 'such awe that I could not read Wordsworth aloud there' (*Journals Mid-Fifties*, p. 149).

¹⁰³ Back cover blurb for *Planet News* (1968), rpt. in Ginsberg, *Collected Poems*, p. 823.

Here Ginsberg self-consciously adapts Wordsworth's famous definition of 'Poetry' as that which 'takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquillity'.¹⁰⁴ It is entirely appropriate that Ginsberg should use this particular Wordsworth quotation as part of the prose matter for his collection *Planet News*, since this mirrors the phrase's origins, in Wordsworth's 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads*. The clear implication is that a parallel is to be drawn not only between 'Wales Visitation' and 'Tintern Abbey', but also between the collections that contain them.

Ginsberg's invocation of Wordsworth's 'emotion recollected in tranquillity' is followed by what is in effect a list of the poem's secondary influences: the 'psychedelic inspiration' of LSD, the 'humane ecology' of Gregory Bateson's talk at the Dialectics of Liberation conference and the 'democratic eyeball particulars' seen in the Welsh landscape itself, this final phrase suggesting both Emerson's 'transparent eye-ball' and Blake's 'minute particulars'.¹⁰⁵ The passage's four verbs – 'recollect', 'revise', 'mediate', 'integrate' – summarize Ginsberg's technique in 'Wales Visitation', which is to integrate all the poem's influences into a Wordsworthian recollection of 'Unitive Vision'.

As I have suggested however, the merging of the poem's twin Romantic influences, Blake and Wordsworth, is not unproblematic. Blake's own 'Annotations to Wordsworth' begin with his response to another Wordsworth 'Preface', that which is attached to the 1815 *Poems*. In response to Wordsworth's claim that 'The powers requisite for the production of poetry are, first, those of observation and description [...] whether the things depicted be actually present to the senses, or have a place only in the memory', Blake writes 'One Power alone makes a poet. – Imagination The Divine Vision' (E665). Blake's final annotation to the *Poems* makes a similar argument: 'Imagination has nothing to do with Memory' (E666).

Blake not only privileges 'Imagination The Divine Vision' over memory, but also spontaneity over 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'. Blake did of course also revise his work – the evolution of Blake's Albion myth during the complex recycling of *The Four Zoas* into *Milton* and *Jerusalem* being an important case in point for this chapter – but it is also true that one of the major advantages he saw in his innovative

¹⁰⁴ 'Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*', in William Wordsworth, *The Major Works*, ed. by Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 595-615 (p. 611).

¹⁰⁵ Blake's 'minute particulars' are also referenced in the final stanza of the poem itself, which asks: 'What did I notice? Particulars! The / vision of the great One is myriad'.

printmaking technique was that it allowed for spontaneous and fluid composition of text and image directly onto the copper plate.¹⁰⁶

This spontaneous aspect of Blake's creative work was highly valued by Ginsberg and other Beats. Ginsberg consistently linked his own motto, 'First Thought, Best Thought' (coined by either Ginsberg himself or his Tibetan guru Chögyam Trungpa) to a similar aphorism that Ginsberg attributed to Blake: 'First Thought is Best in Art, Second in Other Matters.'¹⁰⁷ Yet both of these aphorisms sit uncomfortably with Wordsworth's 'emotion recollected in tranquillity', which associates vision with revision.

As mentioned earlier, there are two significantly different published versions of Ginsberg's Welsh poem; Ginsberg implies that the pamphlet version entitled *Wales – A Visitation* represents the draft written in the fifth hour of his LSD trip, while 'Wales Visitation' as published in *Planet News* is the version as revised on his return to London. We might therefore suggest that *Wales – A Visitation* represents the spontaneous form of composition Ginsberg valued in Blake, while 'Wales Visitation' represents the Wordsworthian version recollected and revised 'in tranquillity' (perhaps even after a re-reading of 'Tintern Abbey'?).¹⁰⁸ The fact that *Wales – A Visitation* is missing the crucial Wordsworthian reference to 'clouds passing through skeleton arches of Tintern Abbey', would seem to support this idea. I do not want to push this idea too far however; the earlier draft does still contain an injunction to 'Remember your day' and a reference to 'the cry of Blake and the silent thought of / Wordsworth in his Eld stillness', so that both poems contain Wordsworthian and Blakean elements. Furthermore, the complexities of the poem's twin Romantic inheritances are also encapsulated in the fact that Ginsberg did decide to preserve both versions, which were both published around the same time in mid-1968, nearly a year after their composition. This impulse to preserve the earlier draft, and therefore the memory of its spontaneous, Blakean visionary composition, can also paradoxically be seen in terms of a Wordsworthian attachment to vision.

¹⁰⁶ See Joseph Viscomi, 'Illuminated Printing', in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. by Morris Eaves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 37-62 (p. 47).

¹⁰⁷ See for example Ginsberg's 'Mind Writing Slogans' in *What Book?!: Buddha Poems from Beat to Hip-hop*, ed. by Gary Gach (Berkeley: Parallax, 1998), pp. 197-201 (p. 197).

¹⁰⁸ Indeed, Ginsberg continued the process of revision, making further (albeit more minor) changes to 'Wales Visitation' for *Collected Poems*.

Punks of Dawlish and children of Albion

Ginsberg's Romanticist pilgrimages to sites associated with Blake and Wordsworth continued to be a feature of his visits to Britain through the 1970s and beyond. In June 1979, Ginsberg visited Wordsworth's grave in the Lake District, and later the same year visited the thatched cottage at Felpham on the Sussex coast where Blake had lived between 1800 and 1804.¹⁰⁹ This was the period during which Blake began working on his longer prophetic epics; it was also while living in Sussex that Blake was charged with sedition after an altercation with a soldier outside his house. Furthermore, the cottage at Felpham was a particularly important pilgrimage site for Ginsberg because none of the buildings in which Blake had lived in London still survived in anything like their original form, so this was Ginsberg's only real chance to see the dwelling place of his beloved Blake. Ginsberg was photographed outside the cottage, holding up a copy of plate 36 of *Milton*, which features Blake's etching of the same cottage (see Figure 7 below).

¹⁰⁹ Bill Morgan, *I Celebrate Myself: The Somewhat Private Life of Allen Ginsberg* (New York: Penguin, 2007), pp. 537-9.



Figure 7. Ginsberg outside Blake's cottage in Felpham, Sussex, in 1979, holding Blake's picture of the same cottage. Courtesy of the Ginsberg Collection.

It was also during this visit to the UK that Ginsberg wrote the poem 'To the Punks of Dawlish' (1979), recording his encounter with a group of young punks on a train as it passed along a picturesque stretch of English coastline. Although Ginsberg continued to regularly visit the UK for the rest of his life, this is his final identifiably 'British' poem,

and once again it explicitly draws on Blake's Albion myth. Its main Blakean intertext however is not *Milton* or *Jerusalem* but the engraved print known as 'Glad Day' or 'Albion Rose' (see Figure 8 below).

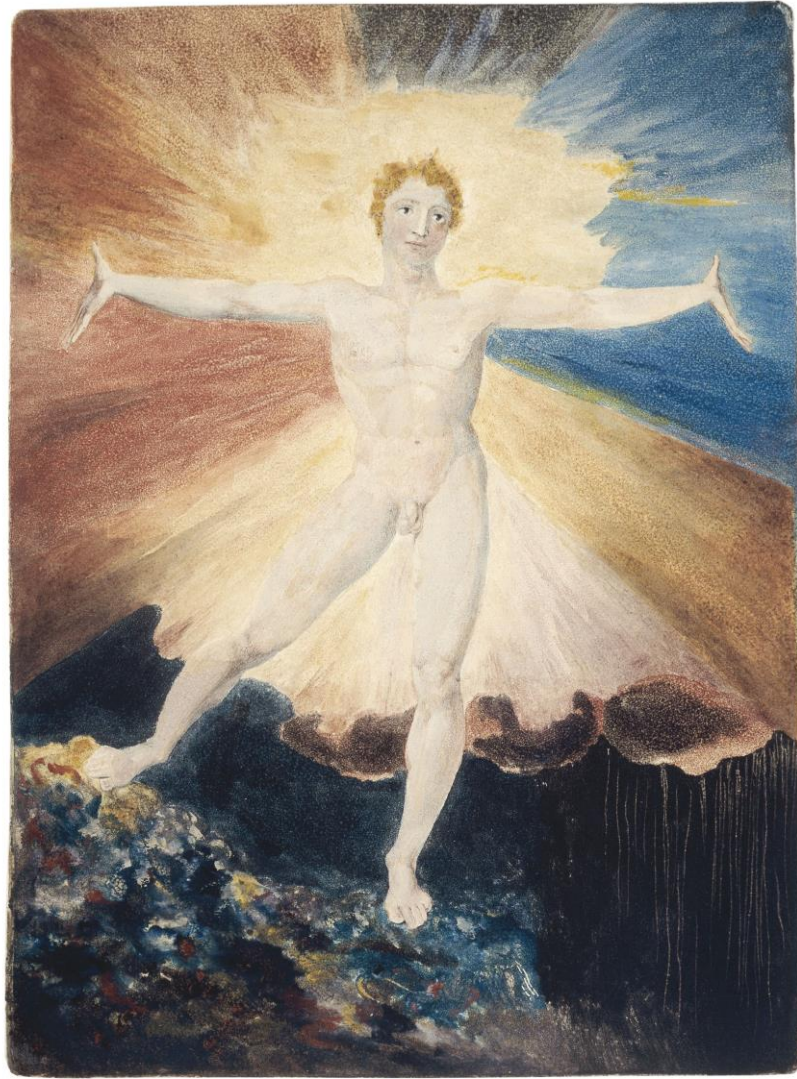


Figure 8. 'Albion Rose' / 'Glad Day'. © Trustees of the British Museum.

Ginsberg had viewed the original engraving of 'Glad Day' in the British Museum during his first visit to Britain in 1958, sending a postcard of the image to Peter Orlovsky.¹¹⁰ It shows a naked young man standing on a rocky foreground with Christ-like arms outstretched and bursts of fire (or rays of sunlight) exploding behind him. A

¹¹⁰ *Straight Hearts' Delight*, p. 138.

decade later, as the partly Ginsberg-inspired Blake boom of the Sixties counterculture was at its height, this image was adorning the walls of hippies and students on both sides of the Atlantic. Although Ginsberg would have been aware of the meaning of the image within Blake's mythography, probably very few of the countless other owners of reproductions of this picture realized that it was an image of the awakened Albion, especially since it was known by a popular title, 'Glad Day', that Blake himself had never used. However, such uncertainty is perhaps appropriate, given that Blake himself had not yet invested the untitled image with the meaning of his Albion myth when he first drew the design in 1780, or even when he printed and painted the iconic final version in 1796. It was only at some point after 1803, when Blake had begun working on *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, in which he completed the complex mythography of Albion by linking his idea of the 'Eternal Man' with the concept of Albion, that he returned once more to the 1796 image, and finally added an inscription. This inscription combines the most famous lines from Milton's *Samson Agonistes* with elements of his own Albion myth: 'Albion rose from where he labourd at the Mill with Slaves / Giving himself for the Nations he danc'd the dance of Eternal Death' (E671).

One figure from the British counterculture of the 1960s who did have a good idea of this image's place in Blake's mythological system was the poet Michael Horovitz, who used the 'Glad Day' image on the cover of *Children of Albion* (1969), the volume of British 'underground' poetry which he edited. The sixty-page 'Afterwords' essay that Horovitz contributed to *Children of Albion* makes repeated references to the details of Blake's Albion myth, as well as to the Sixties counterculture as an awakening of Albion, and ends with the words: 'The unfinished work of Blake – of this unfinished poem – is ours to carry on. The legacy of the whole man.'¹¹¹

However, the Blakean Sixties did not 'carry on' in the way Horovitz (and Ginsberg) had hoped, and by the Seventies the cultural backlash against Ginsberg's Sixties popularization of Blake had begun, including amongst some poets and academics. Seamus Heaney complained privately that the students in his poetry class were 'illiterate, long-haired, hippie, Blake-ridden, Ginsberg-gullible assholes',¹¹² while (as we saw in Chapter One) the Blake scholar M. K. Nurmi was prepared to give Ginsberg himself a certain amount of credit for his understanding of Blake, but still

¹¹¹ Horovitz, p. 377.

¹¹² Quoted in Taura S. Napier, "'Companions of the Cheshire Cheese': epistolary lives of contemporary Irish poets', in *Journal of European Studies* 32, 177-192 (p. 182).

claimed that Blake 'would have been horrified' at 'the currency [he] has found among the psychedelic generation.'¹¹³

At the same time however, the term 'Albion', often retaining an explicit connection to Blake, continued to play an important role of the post-Sixties subcultures of Britain, especially within the Free Festival and New Age Traveller scenes of the Seventies, Eighties and early Nineties. Thus the 'Albion Free State Manifesto', a document written in 1974 by a network of London-based squatters and activists, begins with the words, 'Albion is the other England of Peace and Love which William Blake foresaw in vision – a country freed of dark satanic mills and similar Big-Brother machinations'.¹¹⁴ Similarly, from the late 1970s through the 1980s, 'Albion Fair' was used as a semi-generic term for a number of countercultural free festivals around Britain. As George McKay argues, these 'Albion Fairs' drew on a combination of influences, merging the ethos of the American countercultural gatherings of the Sixties with the traditional seasonal country fairs of Blake's 'green & pleasant Land'.¹¹⁵

With its references to punk and Margaret Thatcher, Ginsberg's 1979 poem 'To the Punks of Dawlish' positions itself within a specifically post-Sixties political and cultural context, even as the poem still uses Blake as a continuing countercultural force. The poem begins:

Your electric hair's beautiful gold as Blake's Glad Day boy,
 you raise your arms for industrial crucifixion
 You get 45 Pounds a week on the Production line
 and 15 goes to taxes, Mrs. Thatcher's nuclear womb swells
 The Iron Lady devours your powers & hours your pounds and pride &
 scatters radioactive urine on your mushroom dotted sheep fields.

Here Margaret Thatcher plays the role of Urizen, Blake's representative of repressive rationalism, whom Ginsberg in his commentaries on Blake often associates with nuclear power and atomic weapons.¹¹⁶ As Ginsberg acknowledged, this aspect of his technique is itself Blakean: 'I've modeled a lot of my own contemporary political poetry on that

¹¹³ M. K. Nurmi, *William Blake* (London: Hutchinson, 1975), p. 12.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in George McKay, *Senseless Acts of Beauty: Cultures of Resistance Since the Sixties* (London: Verso, 1996), p. 11.

¹¹⁵ See the chapter 'The Free Festivals and Fairs of Albion', in McKay, *Senseless Acts of Beauty*, pp. 11-44.

¹¹⁶ See for example Allen Ginsberg, 'Your Reason and Blake's System', in *Deliberate Prose*, pp. 279-284 (pp. 280-281).

form of hyperbole that I found in Blake's 'French Revolution' – just taking contemporary figures and making archetypal monsters out of them.'¹¹⁷

By way of contrast, the punks in the poem – like the 'longhaired kids' Ginsberg described 'turning into Adam' in 1968 – represent Albion, 'Blake's Glad Day boy'. The image of the punks raising their arms 'for industrial crucifixion' also clearly refers to the Christ-like pose of the figure in Blake's image, and once again acts as a reminder that Albion is typologically equivalent not only to Adam, but also to Jesus. However, the poem makes reference not just to the visual imagery of 'Albion Rose/Glad Day', but also to the inscription later added by Blake. The poem's references to working for '45 Pounds a week on the Production line' and to 'humorous slavery in th'electronic factory' both refer back to the first line of Blake's inscription: 'Albion rose from where he laboured at the Mill with Slaves'. Meanwhile the inscription's second part, 'Giving himself for the Nations he danc'd the dance of Eternal Death', is echoed in the line 'Against the Money Establishment you pogo to garage bands' and in Ginsberg's words 'Luck to your dancing revolution!'.¹¹⁸

Despite Ginsberg's genuine enthusiasm for punk music and culture – evident for example in his collaborations with The Clash and in his poem 'Punk Rock Your My Big Crybaby (1977)' – there is a strong sense in 'To the Punks of Dawlish' that Ginsberg is no longer at the centre of the counterculture as he was in the Sixties.¹¹⁹ Rather he is the 'professor on the Plymouth train', who romanticizes the punks he encounters, not only in the literary sense of the word but also the everyday sense. Thus the contrast he draws between the punks on the train and the 'tea-sipping wits of Eton / whispering over scones & clotted cream' is rather crude, as are the comparisons he makes with the 'gold blonde lads' of Oxford and Cambridge. I want to suggest however that these lines can also be linked to his first visit to the UK in 1958, where he discovered '[t]he English thing was, Blake was still not considered "mature", so to speak, by the wits of Oxford.'¹²⁰ On that visit, he had hoped to 'open the floodgates' with his 'huge mad broadcast to all England', 'to tell everyone [the Millennium] is here, at hand & foot.' Although he was of course not yet using the term, Ginsberg was consciously attempting to introduce the Sixties to England, and doing so with the help of William Blake; during

¹¹⁷ 'Urizen lecture 4 (1978)', transcribed at <<http://allenginsberg.org/#!/archive/lecture/william-blake-class-4-urizen-continued?id=524aee0df6d2f01caa000007>> [accessed 11 May 2014].

¹¹⁸ See also Ginsberg's thoughtful assessment of punk in *The Selected Letters of Allen Ginsberg and Gary Snyder*, ed. by Bill Morgan (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2009), p. 196.

¹¹⁹ *Journals Mid-Fifties*, p. 344.

the BBC broadcast he almost burst into tears as he imagined he was addressing Blake himself. This was to be an awakening of 'England's Blake', and of Blake's sleeping giant, Albion itself, whose senses had been dulled by 'tea-sipping wits of Eton' and 'wits of Oxford' alike.

When Ginsberg wrote 'Wales Visitation' during England's 'summer of love' of 1967, his Blakean Sixties project seemed to have been realized more successfully than he could have imagined in 1958, perhaps explaining the poem's ecstatic (and problematic) embrace of a non-politicized, pastoral form. But by 1979, when he wrote 'To the Punks of Dawlish', the Sixties were over. Thus despite its romanticization of its punk subjects, the poem can be seen as an effort by Ginsberg to resurrect and re-politicize Blake's Albion myth in the face of what seemed to be the failure of the countercultural projects of the Sixties, a failure cemented by the election of Thatcher earlier that year.

According to Saree Makdisi's historicist reading of the Albion myth, which I referred to earlier, 'this redemptive apocalypse [the awakening of Albion] must be undertaken not only by the workers of a nascent industrial Britain, but by the slaves and the others bound into this Urizenic system through the conduits of the Universal Empire.'¹²⁰ As Ginsberg's poem accepts, by 1979 this 'redemptive apocalypse' had still not arrived; it was therefore the responsibility of the next countercultural generation, the punks who perform Albion's labour 'at the Mill with Slaves' through their own 'slavery in th'electronic factory', to continue the great task of Albion's awakening. The Blakean subtext of the poem suggests that this will not come about simply through a 'dancing revolution' against Margaret Thatcher's Urizenic conservatism, but only by the punks' recognition that they themselves are Albion.

¹²⁰ Makdisi, p. 165.

Chapter Four: Blake and Dylan

Canonizing Dylan

During a 1965 press conference, Bob Dylan was asked, ‘Do you think of yourself primarily as a singer or a poet?’ In answer, Dylan quipped that he thought of himself ‘more as a song and dance man, y’know’.¹ While the heavily-ironized evasiveness of the response is typical of Dylan, I want to suggest that his unwillingness to engage with this particular question also reveals his awareness (and wariness) of the question’s implied distinction between high and low cultural formats (poetry versus song, or writing versus performance) and its apparent subtexts relating to the canonicity or otherwise of his work. As the filmed press conference continues, such subtexts become more overt, as Dylan’s view is sought on the fact that his lyrics are already becoming the subject of scholarly interest, and he is asked the more general question, ‘What do you think of people who analyze your songs?’²

Despite Dylan’s best efforts at avoidance and obfuscation, variants of this ‘singer or poet’ question have resurfaced whenever Dylan’s relationship to the literary canon has become a matter of public discussion. This was the case in 2003 when Christopher Ricks reignited the issue once again with the publication of *Dylan’s Visions of Sin*, which provides close readings of Dylan’s lyrics and draws parallels with the work of various poets from the high canon of English literature, including Blake and other Romantics.³ The following year, the discussion was given new fuel when Dylan himself published his *Lyrics: 1962-2001*, along with the first volume of his memoir *Chronicles*.⁴ However, the subsequent media debates about Dylan’s status as poet and the canonicity or otherwise of his lyrics were notable for the way in which they followed Ricks’s lead in paying minimal attention to the historical context either of Dylan’s songs or the literary works – especially Romantic poetry – to which they were being linked.

¹ ‘Television Press Conference, KQED (San Francisco), December 3, 1965’, in *Dylan on Dylan: The Essential Interviews*, ed. by Jonathan Cott (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2006), pp. 61-80 (p. 62). In 1972, Michael Gray used Dylan’s answer as the title of his ever-expanding study of Dylan, currently in its third edition as *Song & Dance Man III: The Art of Bob Dylan* (London: Continuum, 2000).

² *Dylan on Dylan*, p. 65.

³ Christopher Ricks, *Dylan’s Visions of Sin* (London: Penguin, 2003).

⁴ Bob Dylan, *Lyrics: 1962-2001* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2004).

In seeking to investigate the links between Dylan and Blake, this chapter therefore becomes part of a debate which has a long history, but whose terms have often seemed unsatisfactory; furthermore it is a debate which Dylan himself has alternately fuelled and warned against. As I will argue, Dylan's wary and often contradictory approach to two key questions, concerning his position within the poetic canon and his position within Sixties counterculture, provides the backdrop to his relationship to Blake, a poet who by the Sixties had himself only recently gained a secure place within the high canon of English literature, as well as within the alternative textual canons of the Beat movement and Sixties counterculture.

Blake and Music

Although Blake, as far as we know, was never asked to choose between the roles of poet and singer as Dylan was, it would have been a valid question. Arguably he could indeed be categorized not only as a poet, engraver, printmaker and painter, but also as a songwriter and singer; this is an aspect of Blake's work that should be apparent from the title of his best-known work, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, but which is nonetheless often overlooked. The lyrical form of the collection is emphasized through the content of the first poem or song, the 'Introduction' to *Innocence* ('Piping down the valleys wild'), which features a narrator who, at the request of an angelic child, firstly pipes, then sings, and finally writes down his songs (which the reader must assume are the songs of Blake's collection itself), thus providing a model of poetic composition which begins with non-vocal music, continues with oral poetry or song, and ends with written literature.⁵

I also want to note here the complex relationship between Blake's *Songs* and more traditional eighteenth-century children's songs and hymns. This is a topic which has already received much attention within Blake scholarship,⁶ but it also provides another link to Dylan, who himself makes frequent use of traditional children's songs

⁵ Whether deliberate or not, there are strong similarities between Dylan's 'Mr. Tambourine Man' and this poem. Both feature a request to a musician – the 'Piper' or the 'Tambourine Man' – to play a song, and describe the ecstatic effects of that song (which is also the text itself) on the listener, who variously weeps 'with joy to hear' or dances 'beneath the diamond sky with one hand waving free'.

⁶ Good summaries of this topic are provided by Zachary Leader, *Reading Blake's Songs* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), especially the chapter 'Children's books, education, and vision' (pp. 1-36), and by Heather Glen, *Vision and Disenchantment: Blake's Songs and Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), especially the chapter 'Poetic "Simplicity": Blake's *Songs* and Eighteenth-century Children's Verse' (pp. 8-32).

within his work. Later in this chapter I will suggest that Dylan's use of children's songs is not only similar to Blake's, but sometimes also shows the direct influence of Blake.

There is good evidence that Blake composed or improvised tunes to accompany at least some of his works, with several contemporary accounts of Blake singing his songs or poems. One of his friends later remembered that although Blake 'was entirely unacquainted with the science of music, his ear was so good, that his tunes were sometimes most singularly beautiful, and were noted down by musical professors'.⁷ If this is true, it is unfortunate that no notation of Blake's tunes has survived. Blake's musical aptitude is also highlighted in some accounts of his death; he is said to have died 'Singing of the things he saw in Heaven'.⁸

These original musical contexts of Blake's own work, combined with the general importance of Blake to the Sixties, make it unsurprising that Blake should have a deep influence on the popular music associated with the counterculture. This chapter's focus on the links between Blake and Dylan in fact represents a significant restriction of focus, since Blakean references are also found in the work of a very diverse range of other musicians and groups associated with the countercultural movements of the period, including The Doors, The Fugs, The Kinks, Emerson, Lake & Palmer, Patti Smith and Van Morrison.

There are also broader thematic links to Blake that could be explored here if there were space, such as the striking presence within popular Sixties music of themes relating to the Romantic (or 'Satanic') interpretation of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, an interpretation encoded most fundamentally and succinctly in Blake's observation in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that Milton was 'of the Devils party without knowing it' (E35). This link is very briefly explored by Laura Lungers Knoppers and Gregory M. Colón Semenza in *Milton in Popular Culture* (2006), where they highlight (without claiming a direct textual influence) the links between Blake's reading of *Paradise Lost* and The Rolling Stones' 'Sympathy for the Devil'.⁹ Clearly, there is scope for this Miltonic aspect of Blake's influence on Sixties music to be explored further in relation to other music of the period, not least in connection with the songs of The Doors, a band who famously took their name from Blake's 'doors of perception' but whose Blakean

⁷ See G. E. Bentley, *The Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), pp. 74-5.

⁸ See Bentley, *Stranger from Paradise*, pp. 437-8.

⁹ Laura Lungers Knoppers and Gregory M. Colón Semenza, 'Introduction', in *Milton in Popular Culture*, ed. by Knoppers and Semenza (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 1-19 (p. 9).

connections have only very recently begun to receive some serious scholarly attention, largely thanks to the work of Tristanne Connolly.¹⁰

The link between Blake and Dylan has been noted by many of those who have written on Dylan from the 1960s to the present day. Amongst the popular music writers who are known for their work on Dylan, the most detailed and useful links to Blake are made by Michael Gray,¹¹ while other popular writers such as Robert Shelton and Clinton Heylin simply make reference to an assumed Blake-Dylan connection without providing much in the way of supportive textual analysis.¹²

The link to Blake is also widely noted by literary scholars who have turned their attention to Dylan, although the claims made here can also be sweeping and lacking in evidence. So for example, in the 'Introduction' to the *Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan*, Kevin Dettmar states that 'Bob Dylan is the spiritual twin of the English Romantic poet William Blake',¹³ but other than a very general suggestion that Dylan and Blake can be seen to share a similarly heterodox approach to religion, neither Dettmar nor any of the other contributors to the *Cambridge Companion* actually go on to provide any concrete textual evidence to link these 'spiritual twins'.

As we might expect, some more in-depth analysis of the Blake-Dylan connection has been conducted by those who have approached the topic from the perspective of Blake scholarship. However, despite the increasing attention paid to various aspects of Blake's posthumous reception in recent years, I know of only two such articles that are specifically focused on the Blake-Dylan connection. These are Steve Clark and James Keery's "'Only the wings on his heels": Blake and Dylan'

¹⁰ Tristanne Connolly, "'He Took a Face from the Ancient Gallery": Blake and Jim Morrison', in *Blake 2.0: William Blake in Twentieth-Century Art, Music and Culture*, ed. by Steve Clark, Tristanne Connolly, and Jason Whittaker (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 230-247; Tristanne Connolly, 'How Much Did Jim Morrison Know about William Blake', *Zoamorphosis: The Blake 2.0 Blog*, ed. by Jason Whittaker (March 2011) <<http://zoamorphosis.com/2011/03/how-much-did-jim-morrison-know-about-william-blake/>> [accessed 4 October 2013]; Tristanne Connolly, 'L. A. Woman, A City Yet a Woman: Blake, Jim Morrison, and Prophecy', *Zoamorphosis* (February 2011) <<http://zoamorphosis.com/2011/02/l-a-woman-a-city-yet-a-woman-blake-jim-morrison-and-prophecy/>> [accessed 4 October 2013]. Connolly does not herself address the Miltonic aspect of Blake's influence on The Doors.

¹¹ See for example the multiple references to Blake in Gray's *Song and Dance Man*, and the entry for Blake in Gray's *The Bob Dylan Encyclopedia* (London: Continuum, 2006), pp 51-54.

¹² See for example Robert Shelton, *No Direction Home: The Life and Music of Bob Dylan* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003), pp. 276, 463, 486; Clinton Heylin, *Still on the Road: The Songs of Bob Dylan, Vol. 2: 1974-2008* (London: Constable, 2010), pp. 183-184.

¹³ Kevin J. H. Dettmar, 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan*, ed. by Kevin J. H. Dettmar (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1-14 (p. 8).

(2013), and Nelson Hilton's short piece 'Waxed in Blake' (2009).¹⁴ Despite their short length, these both point the way towards the kind of detailed, historically contextualized analysis of Blake and Dylan texts that is often lacking elsewhere. They also however show that there is still much more work to be done in this area.

At the core of the critical 'canon' of Blakean Dylan songs, there are three, 'Gates of Eden', 'Golden Loom', and 'Every Grain of Sand' that are generally assumed to take their titles from Blake. I will begin by briefly discussing each of these songs, alongside one other song, 'Jokerman', which has an unusually direct link with one of Blake's visual designs. In doing so, I will attempt not only to summarize previous discussions of these Blakean songs, but also to suggest ways in which the Blakean influence on the song might not be as straightforward as has sometimes been claimed. This will lead to an investigation of the origins and nature of Dylan's interest in Blake, encompassing firstly a discussion of the tensions of literary influence that exist within the three-way relationship between Dylan, Ginsberg and Blake, and secondly a wide-ranging investigation of Dylan's earliest uses of Blake, which occur in 'Chimes of Freedom' and the linked poem '11 Outlined Epitaphs'. I will conclude the chapter by linking my previous discussion to a very recent song by Dylan, 'Roll on John' (2012), which not only makes extensive and explicit use of Blake, but also takes as its theme the Sixties themselves.

'Gates of Eden' and 'Golden Loom'

As we saw in Chapter Three, when Allen Ginsberg first heard Dylan perform 'Gates of Eden' in England in 1965, he immediately noted the song's Blakean title, and included a reference to it in his poem 'Who Be Kind To', in which he suggested that Dylan's song was both example of and cause of the Sixties awakening of Albion in England. The song's links to Blake have also been noted by many of those who have written on Dylan; Michael Gray for example makes the bold claim that '[t]he purposive force of what is palpably Blakeian impinges in every verse. [...] The general themes of "Gates of Eden" could not be more Blakeian and nor could their treatment.'¹⁵ Alongside such

¹⁴ Steve Clark and James Keery, "'Only the wings on his heels": Blake and Dylan', in *Blake 2.0: William Blake in Twentieth-Century Art, Music and Culture*, ed. by Steve Clark, Tristanne Connolly, and Jason Whittaker (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 209-229; Nelson Hilton, 'Waxed in Blake', *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly*, 43 (2009): 110-111.

¹⁵ Gray, *Song & Dance Man III*, pp. 61, 62.

rather generalized comments, Gray also makes the more specific and useful observation that 'Gates of Eden' relies on a series of Blakean oppositions:

Dylan is treating of balances of opposites – of material wealth and spiritual; of earthly reality and the imaginatively real; of the body and soul; of false gods and true vision; of self-gratification and salvation; of mortal ambitions and the celestial city; of sins and forgiveness; of evil and good.¹⁶

Although Gray does not provide much in the way of detailed evidence to back up these points, I want to suggest that the validity of his argument is immediately apparent from the song's first verse:

Of war and peace the truth just twists
Its curfew gull just glides
Upon four-legged forest clouds
The cowboy angel rides
With his candle lit into the sun
Though its glow is waxed in black
All except when 'neath the trees of Eden.

Expanding on Gray's basic point, we can see that not only does the song begin with the paired terms 'war and peace', but Dylan presents them as Blakean contraries rather than as simple opposites; they are held in balance, with neither term privileged by 'the truth', which 'twists' and 'glides'.

Rather surprisingly, Gray does not make any reference to the central aphorism from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* on which his own analysis of 'Gates of Eden' would seem to depend: 'Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence' (E34). Neither does he mention Dylan's most overt signposting of his use of Blakean contraries in the song, namely the reference in the seventh verse to 'kingdoms of Experience', which seems to gesture towards Blake's most famous pair of contraries, 'Innocence' and 'Experience'.

'Gates of Eden' is also the subject of the short piece by Nelson Hilton mentioned above. Hilton uses the recent publication of a facsimile manuscript containing an early draft of the lyrics of this song to build a convincing case for the very specific influence of certain lines from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* on the first

¹⁶ Gray, *Song & Dance Man III*, p. 61.

verse of Dylan's song. Hilton's comparison of the final version of the first verse with Dylan's draft version and with lines from Blake's *Marriage* is worth quoting in full:

The facsimile has in the third line not 'four-legged' but 'fungus forest cloud.' This, together with the twisting of the truth, the black glow, and the setting 'neath the trees,' seems to strongly recall 'A Memorable Fancy' in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plates 17-18. There the speaker, in the company of 'An Angel,' finds himself 'sitting in the twisted root of an oak. he was suspended in a fungus' and beholding 'the sun, black but shining' (E 41). In the facsimile the cowboy angel 'lights his candle in the sun' (itself replacing the original 'his candle burns the day'), which flips us a few plates forward in *Marriage* to the argument that 'a man of mechanical talents' producing volumes – or vinyl recordings 'waxed in black' – from the writings of inspired authors should 'not say that he knows better than his master, for he only holds a candle in sunshine' (pl. 22, E 43).¹⁷

Hilton's detailed analysis, while highly persuasive, does not provide definitive proof of the song's textual relationship with *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. (Such proofs, I will suggest, are stubbornly hard to find in Dylan's works.) However, it fits well with the idea (not mentioned by Hilton) that the song is based on a series of Blakean contraries, since the primary text which sets out Blake's theory of contraries is *Marriage* itself. Hilton's brief piece also neglects to explore any further the significance of the fact that the literary influence of 'inspired authors' is the main subject of the lines from plate 22 of *Marriage* quoted above, lines that Hilton suggests Dylan's song is in turn influenced by. I want to suggest therefore that relationships of influence are present thematically as well as in practice in *Marriage* and 'Gates of Eden'. Indeed, they may be the 'relationships of ownership' that 'whisper in the wings' later in Dylan's song.

A variety of possible Blakean sources for the title of Dylan's song have been suggested. For example, the idea that the title may draw on one or both versions of Blake's *The Gates of Paradise* has been suggested by several scholars including Hilton himself and Lawrence Wilde.¹⁸ However, despite the widespread assumption that the title is borrowed from Blake, a definitive textual source remains elusive. Nowhere in Blake's writing does he use the exact phrase 'Gates of Eden'. However, significant references to gates, and to Eden, and to gates that lead to Eden or to synonyms thereof abound within Blake's works. Blake's many uses of the formulation 'gates of' include

¹⁷ Hilton, 'Waxed in Blake', 110-111 (p. 110). The facsimile itself can be found in Robert Santelli's rather beautiful *The Bob Dylan Scrapbook, 1956-1966* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2005), p. 41 (insert).

¹⁸ Hilton, p. 110; Lawrence Wilde, 'The Cry of Humanity: Dylan's Expressionist Period', in *The Political Art of Bob Dylan*, ed. by David Boucher and Gary Browning (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 79-104 (p. 92).

not only 'Gates of Paradise'¹⁹ as mentioned above, but also 'gates of the eternal day',²⁰ 'Gates of Eternal life',²¹ 'Gates of Heaven',²² 'Gates of Jerusalem',²³ 'Gates of the Human Heart',²⁴ 'Gates of Birth',²⁵ and 'Gates of Death',²⁶ amongst others.

Furthermore, although the exact phrase 'Gates of Eden' does not occur anywhere in Blake's writing, he does describe such gates, and indeed gives them a central place in his mythopoetic system. As Alexander Gourlay notes, in Blake's system 'Eden is a state of mind as well as a location';²⁷ this is also the case in Dylan's song, and indeed is an important aspect of the utopian impulse within Sixties counterculture more generally.²⁸ Plates 12 and 13 of *Jerusalem* contain a lengthy and elaborate description of the construction of the spiritual city of Golgonooza, in which Blake continually expands, refines, and reiterates the complex geometry and symbolism of the city, focusing especially on its four gates, one of which leads to Eden. Moreover, in Blake's highly complex multidimensional system, each of the four gates is itself fourfold, and each leads not only outwards but also inwards towards the others:

Fourfold the Sons of Los in their divisions: and fourfold,
The great City of Golgonooza: fourfold toward the north
And toward the south fourfold, & fourfold toward the east & west
Each within other toward the four points: that toward
Eden, and that toward the World of Generation,
And that toward Beulah, and that toward Ulro[.]²⁹
(J 12:45-50; E156)

¹⁹ As well as forming the title of the two works by Blake mentioned previously, the phrase 'Gates of Paradise' also occurs in 'The Everlasting Gospel' (E876).

²⁰ *Europe*, E61.

²¹ *The Four Zoas*, E360.

²² *Jerusalem*, E241; *The Four Zoas*, E332, E334.

²³ *Jerusalem*, E226.

²⁴ *Jerusalem*, E203.

²⁵ *Jerusalem*, E173, E214.

²⁶ *Milton*, E108; *Jerusalem*, E173; *The Four Zoas*, E374; 'The Everlasting Gospel', E524.

²⁷ Alexander Gourlay, 'A Glossary of Terms, Names, and Concepts in Blake', in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. by Morris Eaves (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 272-87 (274).

²⁸ It is for example significant that Morris Dickstein borrows Dylan's song title for his seminal book, *Gates of Eden: American Culture in the Sixties* (New York: Basic Books, 1977). As part of his initial analysis of the meaning of 'Eden' within Sixties counterculture, Dickstein refers to Blake's assertion in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that 'the whole creation will be consumed, and appear infinite. and holy whereas it now appears finite & corrupt. This will come to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment.' (E39; Dickstein, p. vii).

²⁹ S. Foster Damon's *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (1965; repr. Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2013) features a visual diagram of Golgonooza and its gates (p.163), but notes that 'Golgonooza, being four-dimensional, cannot be reduced to a chart of two dimensions.'

Dylan's plural 'gates' of Eden can therefore be seen to reflect the geometry of Blake's own imagination, in which multiple gates lead towards Eden.³⁰

Furthermore, it can be linked to that aspect of Golgonooza which is spiritually equivalent to the human body, especially its four gates which represent the senses:

And the Eyes are the South, and the Nostrils are the East.
And the Tongue is the West, and the Ear is the North.
(J 12:59-60; E156)

In the same passage from *Jerusalem*, Blake explains that 'The Western Gate fourfold, is clod' (J 13:6; E156), and describes how each gate is defended by a series of fearsome guardians. It is the poet's task to break through these barriers of the senses, 'doors of perception' as Blake calls them in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which prevent the senses from perceiving the world 'as it is: infinite'.³¹ This is surely the single most influential Blakean message to take hold within Sixties counterculture; The Doors, named after this line from *Marriage*, sang of the desire to 'Break on Through (To the Other Side)', but I want to suggest that Blake's message was also understood and explored in the works of Dylan.

The second Dylan song title that seems to come from Blake is 'Golden Loom', an outtake from *Desire* (1975).³² The phrase 'Golden Loom(s)' occurs a total of nine times in Blake's works, including one in the same passage from *Jerusalem* in which Blake describes the multiple gates of Golgonooza leading to Eden, which I have suggested is the most likely source for Dylan's 'Gates of Eden'.³³ The evidence for the direct influence of Blake on Dylan's 'Golden Loom' is further strengthened by the consistent set of symbolic meanings which is attached to the phrase in Blake's work. In Blake's mythopoetic system it is associated with the female form (the message that every

³⁰ In their own discussion of the song, Clark and Keery briefly note that 'Dylan may have taken "that toward Eden", "the eastern gate fourfold", as referring to plural "gates of Eden"' (Clark and Keery, p. 226).

³¹ Elsewhere in the passage from *Jerusalem*, Blake describes how the gate 'towards Eden is walled up, till time of renovation' (J 12:52; E156), and also how the 'third Gate' within every inhabitant of Golgonooza 'Is clod as with a threefold curtain of ivory & fine linen & ermine (J 13:23; E157). Kathleen Raine glosses this as the gate of the senses, 'closed by the "curtain" of the physical body (the ivory bones and woven fibres of the bodily "garment")'. See Raine, Kathleen, *Golgonooza, City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake* (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1991), p. 110.

³² 'Golden Loom' was eventually released on *The Bootleg Series Volumes 1-3 (Rare & Unreleased) 1961-1991* (1991). The lyrics are included within the *Desire* section of *Lyrics: 1962-2001*, p. 374.

³³ *Jerusalem* 13:25; E157. The other references are *Jerusalem* E148, E206, E220, E245, E249, E250; *The Four Zoas* E319, E405.

‘Female is a Golden Loom’ is repeated three times in *Jerusalem*),³⁴ with love, sex, and the womb (‘the golden Loom of Love’),³⁵ with generation and ultimately also with mortality (‘O dreadful Loom of Death! O piteous Female forms compelld / To weave the Woof of Death’).³⁶ Together these meanings fit closely with the imagery of Dylan’s song, which tells the story of an encounter with a mysterious and alluring woman who carries the loom of the title. The imagery in the song’s second verse in particular seems especially Blakean:

First we wash our feet near the immortal shrine
And then our shadows meet and then we drink the wine
I see the hungry clouds up above your face
And then the tears roll down, what a bitter taste
And then you drift away on a summer’s day where the wildflowers bloom
With your golden loom[.]³⁷

Overall, the song is notable not only for its mythic tone, but more specifically for the way in which both the male speaker and the female subject of the song are turned into archetypal figures without distinct personal identities. This is of course typical of Dylan’s work, but the Blakean title suggests a more direct link to Blake’s similar mythopoetic practice in his prophetic books.

‘Every Grain of Sand’

While ‘Gates of Eden’ and ‘Golden Loom’ seem to suggest that Dylan had at least some knowledge of Blake’s prophetic books, nearly everyone who has written on ‘Every Grain of Sand’ (from *Shot of Love*, 1981) has made reference to the opening lines of Blake’s ‘Auguries of Innocence’ (1803):

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour[.]
(E490)

³⁴ E148, E220, E250.

³⁵ *Jerusalem* E206.

³⁶ *Milton* 35:7-8; E135.

³⁷ As Clark and Keery note (p. 225), the references to ‘immortal shrine’ and ‘hungry clouds’ in this verse may also be direct quotations from Blake’s *Europe* (2:2; E61) and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (E33).

However while this is Blake's most famous reference to a 'Grain of Sand', the phrase also occurs six other times in Blake's works.³⁸ One of these is a passage from *Jerusalem* which contains the exact words of Dylan's title; it is also significant that this passage relates once again to the gates of Golgonooza, here seen in its temporal form as the city of London:

There is in Albion a Gate of precious stones and gold
 Seen only by Emanations, by vegetations viewless,
 Bending across the road of Oxford Street; it from Hyde Park
 To Tyburns deathful shades, admits the wandering souls
 Of multitudes who die from Earth: this Gate cannot be found
 By Satans Watch-fiends tho' they search numbering every grain
 Of sand on Earth every night, they never find this Gate.
 It is the Gate of Los.

(*Jerusalem* 34:55-35:3; E181)

Further evidence to support the idea that Dylan's song title may come from *Jerusalem* rather than 'Auguries of Innocence' can be found in the lines immediately preceding this passage, which contain a reference to the 'looms of Eden' (J 34:53; E180), suggesting the intriguing possibility of a textual link to both Dylan's 'Gates of Eden' and 'Golden Loom'.³⁹

Dylan himself has not only been characteristically reluctant to discuss which Blake passage he had in mind for 'Every Grain of Sand', but has even sought to link the song to another Romantic poet altogether, John Keats, claiming in 1991 that the song came out of 'that area where Keats is'.⁴⁰ This comment has confused one well-known Dylan scholar, Clinton Heylin, who accuses Dylan of pretending 'he doesn't know the difference between Keats and Blake'; Heylin concludes that this must be 'another of Dylan's famous bum steers', since as 'just about every single commentator has observed, the song-poem is Blakean in a multitude of ways'.⁴¹

Although it is always wise to treat Dylan's statements with caution, in this case I believe we should take his words at face value. Heylin seems strangely unwilling to acknowledge Dylan's multiple Romantic influences, and to consider the quite reasonable possibility that these multiple influences might sometimes manifest

³⁸ *Milton* E114; *Jerusalem* E181, E183, E194; 'A Vision of The Last Judgment' E560; 'Letter to Thomas Butts (2 October 1800)' E712.

³⁹ While other scholars have also suggested the passage from *Jerusalem* as a possible source for 'Every Grain of Sand', I believe I am the first to suggest that all three of Dylan's Blakean-titled songs may in fact draw on the same passages.

⁴⁰ 'Interview with Paul Zollo, *SongTalk*, 1991', in *Dylan on Dylan*, pp. 367-89 (p. 383).

⁴¹ Heylin, *Still on the Road*, p. 183.

themselves in the same song. As I have tried to show at various points in this study, the Romantic influence on the Sixties clearly stretches beyond Blake.

In explaining Dylan's comment, I want to suggest firstly that Dylan's reference to 'that area where Keats is' may in fact refer not to the song's content, but to its process of composition, and more specifically to Keats's famous concept of 'Negative Capability', which Keats defines as that state in which 'man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason'.⁴² Although the phrase has since come to be used more broadly, the original context in which Keats coined 'Negative Capability' was a discussion of the conditions necessary for the production of works of high artistic value; it is therefore significant that in the same interview Dylan proudly describes 'Every Grain of Sand' as 'a good poem set to music'.

It is however possible that Dylan is also acknowledging the influence of Keats on the actual content of the song, an influence that seems apparent in the final verse:

I hear the ancient footsteps like the motion of the sea
Sometimes I turn, there's someone there, other times it's only me
I am hanging in the balance of the reality of man
Like every sparrow falling, like every grain of sand.

It seems clear that the image of 'the ancient footsteps' is drawn from Blake's 'Preface' to *Milton* ('And did those feet in ancient time'), particularly given the song's biblical themes and Blakean title. However, 'hanging in the balance of the reality of man' suggests Keats's 'Negative Capability [...] when man is capable of being in uncertainties'. In contrast to Heylin, I therefore want to suggest that 'Every Grain of Sand' is both Blakean *and* Keatsian, and reveals Dylan's strong interest in the broader genre of Romantic poetry itself. Indeed it is often through the posthumous influence of the Romantics that we can best discover the common threads which link writers such as Blake and Keats.

'Jokerman'

It is noteworthy that 'Jokerman' (*Infidels*, 1983), which like 'Every Grain of Sand' is one of the stronger songs from this often disappointing period in Dylan's career, can

⁴² 'Letter to George and Tom Keats, 21 (or 27) December 1817', in *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821*, ed. by Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958), I, pp. 191-194 (p. 193).

also be linked to both Blake and Keats, with an apparent reference to ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ in Dylan’s chorus: ‘Jokerman dance to the nightingale tune / Bird fly high by the light of the moon’. More significantly for my own study however, the music video for ‘Jokerman’ contains Dylan’s only direct visual quotation from Blake as, at the end of the first verse, an image of a plate from *The Book of Urizen* (1794) is displayed.



Figure 9. Image of the bound Urizen from *The Book of Urizen* (Copy D). © Trustees of the British Museum.

This plate (see Figure 9 above) is clearly an illustration of the binding of Urizen described earlier in Blake’s poem:

Forgetfulness, dumbness, necessity!
 In chains of the mind locked up,
 Like fetters of ice shrinking together
 Disorganiz'd, rent from Eternity,
 Los beat on his fetters of iron;
 And heated his furnaces & pour'd
 Iron odor and odor of brass[.]
 (*Urizen* 10:24-30; E75)

In Dylan's video, this image fills the screen in close-up, with the camera slowly panning from top to bottom, so that it is only at the end of the shot that the viewer becomes aware of the 'fetters of iron' that imprison Urizen. At the beginning of the shot, the words of the final lines of Dylan's first verse are also superimposed on the image: 'But with truth so far off / What good will it do?'⁴³

Blake's print is not the only artwork to be displayed during the 'Jokerman' video, which matches Dylan's lyrics with a variety of images, ranging from ancient statues to twentieth-century paintings by Picasso and others. Nevertheless, the use of this image from *Urizen* seems particularly significant for several reasons. Firstly, the visual imposition of Dylan's words onto Blake's artwork unavoidably reminds us of Blake's own distinctive 'composite art', in which words and images are engraved on the same plate. Indeed, we can see a further significance in the fact that Dylan adds his lyrics to a page on which Blake himself had engraved only a picture, and then expands the boundaries of Blake's 'composite art' by the addition of music and video. Secondly, the position of the image of Urizen in the video means that it remains on screen for longer than most of the other artworks, and is the last image we see before the camera cuts for the first time to an image of Dylan himself as he sings the chorus.

I want to suggest that there is a particular link to be made between the image of bound Urizen and the couplet that ends Dylan's second verse: 'Shedding off one more layer of skin / Keeping one step ahead of the persecutor within'. The meaning of Dylan's 'persecutor within' reminds us of Blake's 'mind-forg'd manacles' from 'London'. However, the lines also highlight one of the most striking features of 'Jokerman', the sense of fluid and merging identities. While Gray makes little of the song's links to Blake, his analysis of the song's treatment of different identities is instructive for my own argument:

⁴³ A minor variation on the published lyrics: 'But with the truth so far off, what good will it do?'

Sometimes Dylan seems to be singing about himself and sometimes about Jesus, but the whole is too fluid to need from the listener any analytic effort at separating out the one from the other. [...] [O]ne theme of 'Jokerman' is [...] a recurring self-mockery that laughs at the superficial parallels between Dylan, mythic public figure and Artist-Creator, and Christ, mythic public figure and Son of the Creator. [...] At the same time, Dylan also seems sceptical of the idea that Christ's powers are altogether a good thing.⁴⁴

Such fluidity of characterization, along with an ambiguous relationship between morality and the divine, is also a distinctive and characteristic element of Blake's mythological figures, as summarized by Alexander Gourlay:

most of his characters are multivalent allegorical beings corresponding simultaneously to such things as mental faculties, emotions, psychological categories, political figures or positions, geographical entities, body parts, and so forth. [...] One more caveat: Blake's characters may change in radical fashion, [...] and characters from one context may be presented from a very different perspective elsewhere, even in the same work, and may be known by several different names[.]⁴⁵

Blake's image of bound Urizen, as transplanted to Dylan's 'Jokerman' video, might therefore be read in psychological terms as representing 'the persecutor within', whose Urizenic reliance on rationalism binds both himself and society at large. Indeed, Dylan's song, in combination with Blake's image, makes this or a similar reading possible even to the general viewer or listener who has no prior knowledge of the image's more specific Blakean provenance or meaning.

Having demonstrated the apparent links between Dylan songs from several different periods and the complex mythology of Blake's prophetic books, I want to pause to consider what assumptions I (and other scholars who have made similar links) might be making about Dylan's knowledge of Blake. In an article on the links between Dylan and Joseph Conrad, Allan Simmons wisely cautions that there is always the danger that 'once one begins to listen for echoes of Conrad in Dylan, one begins to hear them everywhere [...]. Some coincidences clearly strain credibility.'⁴⁶ I want to suggest that the same could be said of Dylan's use of Blake, so that the listener, if they have some knowledge of Blake, is often left with a strong sense of the Blakean resonance of a particular Dylan song, but a continuing uncertainty as to whether Dylan really is a

⁴⁴ Gray, *Song & Dance Man III*, p. 481.

⁴⁵ Gourlay, pp. 280-81.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Martin Jacobi, 'Bob Dylan and collaboration', in *The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan*, pp. 69-79 (p. 76).

devoted Blakean, or simply a magpie, perhaps picking up bits and pieces of Blake via Blake's strong cultural presence in the Sixties.

However there are a number of clues which allow us to gain some insight into Dylan's reading of Blake. Thus Dylan's former neighbour, the painter Bruce Dorfman, has related how when he first got to know Dylan in 1967, Dylan was reading Blake, and gave Dorfman 'a handsome edition' of Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* as a Christmas present.⁴⁷ This book (presumably the 1954 Trianon Press full-colour reproduction of *Songs*) was of course an appropriate gift to an artist, but also shows Dylan displaying his own interest in the visual side of Blake, an interest which as we have seen was later manifested in the video to 'Jokerman'.

Dylan himself has also mentioned Blake in a number of interviews. However, when in a 1968 interview he was asked if he had read Blake, Dylan's response was revealing: 'I have tried. Same with Dante and Rilke. I understand what's there, it's just that the connection sometimes does not connect ... Blake did come up with some bold lines though ...'⁴⁸ Dylan thus seems to suggest that he is more interested in borrowing some of those 'bold lines' than in reading them in their original context. As I suggested earlier in this study, such use of Blake's 'bold lines' is not only typical of much Sixties appropriation of Blake, but is also one way in which Blake has been read ever since his own lifetime, when his friend Fuseli admitted that Blake was 'damned good to steal from'. Furthermore, as I have also suggested, such a reading practice is not necessarily un-Blakean. However, Dylan's appropriation of Blake does seem to go beyond the borrowing of a few aphorisms, and Dylan has also spoken more recently about re-reading Blake; in 1992 he described how he was getting 'back into reading the William Blake poems again. It seems like when you're young and you read 'em they don't have the effect on you that they do when you get older.'⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Howard Sounes, *Down the Highway: The Life of Bob Dylan* (London: Doubleday, 2001), p. 231. Sounes also notes that Dylan's mother found his home at this time to be 'a veritable library'. A year earlier, Ginsberg had brought Dylan a box of poetry books, significantly including Blake's works, for Dylan to read while he recovered from his motorcycle accident. Barry Miles, *Ginsberg: A Biography* (London: Viking, 1989), pp. 391-2.

⁴⁸ 'Sing Out! interview, 1968', in *Dylan on Dylan*, pp. 113-138 (p. 119). Ellipses in original interview.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Heylin, *Still on the Road*, p. 385. While Heylin's source for the quote is not entirely clear, he seems to suggest that it is from an interview Dylan gave in Australia in March 1992.

Dylan's bookshelves

While we now know for certain that Dylan had read at least some Blake by 1968 and more by 1992, it seems necessary to address the question of the origins of Dylan's interest in Blake, in preparation for my later examination of Dylan's use of Blake in two works of the early 1960s.

In their article on Blake and Dylan, Steve Clark and James Keery make the plausible assumption that Dylan was first introduced to Blake's work by Suze Rotolo, his highly literate girlfriend of the early 1960s.⁵⁰ There is, as far as I have been able to discover, no direct evidence that this is the case, but we do know that it was Rotolo who introduced Dylan to the work of Bertolt Brecht, and also to the poems of Blake's fellow Romantic, Lord Byron. In her 2008 memoir, Rotolo reveals the transformative effect that such literary encounters had on Dylan's sense of his own identity; she suggests for example that Brecht instantly became 'a part of him', and she also reproduces an image of the title page of her own copy of Byron's poems, which Dylan has signed 'Lord Byron Dylan'.⁵¹ This is of course reminiscent of Dylan's earlier adoption of the persona of Woody Guthrie, and shows that it was not only musical but also literary influences that Dylan absorbed in this very personal way (as is also apparent from his borrowing of Dylan Thomas's name). However, the Byronic connection also serves as a reminder that Blake is not the only Romantic poet to influence Dylan.

Another possible way in which Dylan may have encountered Blake is suggested in a long and fascinating section of his autobiographical work *Chronicles* (2004), where he lovingly details his early influences, especially the vast selection of books he claims to have read when he first arrived in Greenwich Village in the early 1960s, all of which he apparently found on the bookshelves of a bohemian couple with whom he stayed.⁵² Dylan writes, 'The place had an overwhelming presence of literature and you couldn't help but lose your passion for dumbness,' and it is a notably eclectic list, encompassing a wide range of novels, various forms of non-fiction, and numerous works of poetry.⁵³ Significantly, Dylan repeatedly draws our attention to works by Romantic poets including Byron, Shelley and Coleridge, as well as the Romantics' predecessor

⁵⁰ Clark and Keery, p. 227n.

⁵¹ Suze Rotolo, *A Freewheelin' Time: A Memoir of Greenwich Village in the Sixties* (London: Aurum Press, 2008), pp. 235, 172. Later, Dylan would give one of his sons the middle name Byron (Gray, *Bob Dylan Encyclopedia*, p. 199).

⁵² Dylan, *Chronicles*, pp. 23-104.

⁵³ *Chronicles*, p. 35.

Milton,⁵⁴ and writes: 'I began cramming my brain with all kinds of deep poems'.⁵⁵ In an interview given shortly before the publication of *Chronicles*, Dylan returns to this theme: 'I had read a lot of poetry by the time I wrote a lot of those early songs. [...] I was into the hard-core poets. [...] Byron and Keats and all those guys.'⁵⁶

The friends' apartment described in *Chronicles*, with its groaning bookshelves, would therefore seem to be a very likely location for Dylan's early encounters with Blake. The first and most obvious problem with this hypothesis is that Dylan does not mention Blake in *Chronicles*, either in this passage or elsewhere in the book. However, there is another significant problem, which is that according to Sean Wilentz, a historian who also has personal connections to the Greenwich Village scene of the early Sixties, the owners of the apartment in which Dylan claims to have read all these books are fictional creations, and not simply in the sense of being pseudonymous.⁵⁷ While they may be based on amalgams of a number of different real people, the fictional status of 'Ray Gooch' and 'Chloe Kiel' (a couple whose lives – like their bookshelves – Dylan describes in considerable detail) obviously also throws into question the existence of the well-stocked library Dylan describes so vividly. More generally, the reliability of any statement Dylan makes about his early Sixties influences is put into doubt.

At the same time however, this 'library' section from *Chronicles* does not simply consist of a list of authors or book titles; on the contrary, it is notable for the way in which Dylan launches into enthusiastic and detailed analyses of many of the books he enjoyed at the time. The books and the reading therefore seem to be very real, even if the bookshelves and their owners are not.

This section of *Chronicles* also makes clear the breadth of Dylan's literary interests, which stretch well beyond poetry. One theme that is particularly highlighted is Dylan's interest in nineteenth-century American history. Indeed, Dylan explains that he not only read many history books on different aspects of this topic, but that he also conducted original research worthy of any historian. He describes repeated visits to the reading rooms of the New York Public Library, where he studied microfilm copies of newspapers 'from 1855 to about 1865'; there he became fascinated by the everyday stories he encountered, not only of the Civil War itself, but also of 'reform movements, antigambling leagues, rising crime, child labour, temperance, slave-wage factories,

⁵⁴ *Chronicles*, pp. 27, 37, 38, 56.

⁵⁵ *Chronicles*, p. 56.

⁵⁶ *Dylan on Dylan*, p. 434.

⁵⁷ Sean Wilentz, *Bob Dylan in America* (London: Bodley Head, 2010), p. 299.

loyalty oaths and religious revivals'.⁵⁸ Once again, he gives a lengthy summary of the details of his microfilm reading, and even lists the titles of the most useful of these nineteenth century newspapers.⁵⁹ As Wilentz puts it, for any academic writing about Dylan, it is 'mildly thrilling to learn that Dylan discovered the cuneiforms of his art in the microfilm room.'⁶⁰ Wilentz also wonders, 'What do those tangled influences tell us about America? What do they tell us about Bob Dylan?',⁶¹ but we might also rephrase these questions slightly, and ask what Dylan's eclectic influences tell us about the Sixties and its counterculture.

Particularly, I want to suggest that Dylan's keen historian's interest in nineteenth-century America reinforces one of the central arguments of my study, which is that Sixties counterculture typically strives not only towards the creation of a 'New Age', but also towards the radical rediscovery of an old one, in a manner that can almost be described as antiquarian. The counterculture is thus constructed out of a multitude of historic and literary elements, both 'radical' and 'mainstream', canonical and non-canonical; all these sources, including Blake, are in turn affected by their own Sixties appropriation. The works of William Blake become particularly important elements of the Sixties but a similar pattern of Sixties appropriation also applies to many other texts. Dylan did not of course need to turn to nineteenth-century newspapers to discover Blake, but his microfilm reading does suggest a broader interest in the nineteenth century of which Blake was also a part, and as I will suggest shortly, in one particular case I believe his reading of these old newspapers may indeed have influenced his appropriation of Blake.

Dylan, Ginsberg and Blake

In the 'library' section of *Chronicles*, Dylan also lists a number of works by Ginsberg and Kerouac,⁶² and we know that in this period he was reading the work of other Beat writers including Corso and Ferlinghetti.⁶³ Indeed Dylan's own works have sometimes been included within the canon of Beat literature. Thus, according to folksinger Dave Van Ronk, 'Bobby is very much a product of the beat generation. [...] You are not

⁵⁸ *Chronicles*, p. 84.

⁵⁹ 'Newspapers like the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Brooklyn Daily Times*, and the *Pennsylvania Freeman*. Others, too, like the *Memphis Daily Eagle*, the *Savannah Daily Herald* and *Cincinnati Enquirer*' (*Chronicles*, p. 84).

⁶⁰ Wilentz, p. 301.

⁶¹ Wilentz, p. 8.

⁶² *Chronicles*, p. 34.

⁶³ See Gray, *Bob Dylan Encyclopedia*, p. 42.

going to see any more like him. Bobby came into beat poetry just at the very tail end. He towers above all of them, except perhaps Ginsberg.’⁶⁴ However, Dylan’s status as a Beat rests not only on his writing and influences, but also on his personal friendships with several Beats, particularly Allen Ginsberg and Michael McClure. Given the importance of Blake to Ginsberg, and his role as a Sixties promoter of Blake, it hardly needs pointing out that Ginsberg represents a likely source for at least some of Dylan’s knowledge of Blake; however, I want to suggest here that the dynamics of influence between Dylan, Ginsberg and Blake also operate in more than one direction, and are thus more complicated than might at first be supposed.

I want to begin demonstrating this three-way dynamic of influence, and the tension within it, through a description of a very literal textual borrowing, that of a whole manuscript. In 1972 Ginsberg finally published his early lyric poems, under the Blakean title *The Gates of Wrath*. As we saw in Chapter Two, these poems mainly date from around the time of Ginsberg’s 1948 Blake vision, with titles such as ‘On Reading William Blake’s “The Sick Rose”’ and ‘Vision 1948’, and are also somewhat Blakean in style. At the end of the 1972 collection, Ginsberg included a note (‘Hindsight’) explaining that he had originally sent the manuscript to a publisher in England in the early Fifties, who had apparently lost it: ‘I had no complete copy till 1968 when old typescript was returned thru poet Bob Dylan – it passed into his hands years earlier.’⁶⁵ The story is intriguing and mysterious. Ginsberg’s note suggests that the poems had been in Dylan’s possession for some time (since ‘years earlier’) and yet by 1968 Dylan and Ginsberg had already been good friends for around five years, during which time Dylan had never returned them, or seemingly even mentioned them.

There are several points to be made about this story. Firstly, it seems highly likely that at least some of Blake’s earlier influence on Dylan comes via these unpublished Ginsberg poems.⁶⁶ Secondly, Dylan’s mysterious acquisition and long-term loan of Ginsberg’s manuscript has certain uncomfortable similarities with his infamous habit of stealing interesting records from friends’ record collections.⁶⁷ More specifically, the borrowing of these poems provides us with a context within which to understand one of the stranger questions directed at Dylan during the same 1965 press

⁶⁴ Quoted in *Bob Dylan Encyclopedia*, p. 42.

⁶⁵ Allen Ginsberg, *The Gates of Wrath: Rhymed Poems, 1948-1952* (Bolinas, CA: Grey Fox Press, 1972), p. 56.

⁶⁶ This suggestion is also made by Nelson Hilton in ‘Waxed in Blake’ (pp. 110-111).

⁶⁷ See Shelton, *No Direction Home*, pp.73-4, where Dylan’s victims recall his behaviour with a mixture of horror and admiration: ‘He had an unerring sense of what to take’ (p.74).

conference with which this chapter began: ‘Do you think there will ever be a time when you’ll be hung as a thief?’ The questioner was Allen Ginsberg himself, to whom, after a moment’s pause, Dylan responded, ‘You weren’t supposed to say that.’⁶⁸ I am not suggesting that Ginsberg’s question related specifically to the *Gates of Wrath* manuscript (although Ginsberg’s note seems to suggest that it may well have already been in Dylan’s possession by that time), or that Ginsberg did not mean his question as a joke or wind-up, but rather that there are underlying tensions concerning borrowing, stealing and literary influence, which are revealed in this incident.

It is also significant that according to Ginsberg’s note in *The Gates of Wrath*, the return of these lyric poems, combined with his deepening friendship with Dylan, actually inspired Ginsberg’s own interest in recording songs. This preoccupation led to the release of his album *Songs of Innocence and Experience by William Blake, tuned by Allen Ginsberg* (1970), but also influenced Ginsberg’s poetic practice more generally in the decades that followed. He now hoped ‘to write a poem or song with words that are so inevitable that people will be able to use it all the time – like Dylan or Blake.’⁶⁹

We can therefore identify a complex, cyclical dynamic of influence existing between Dylan and Ginsberg, moreover one that clearly involves Blake. In the liner notes to his Blake album, Ginsberg once again linked Blake and Dylan, expressing the hope that ‘musical articulation of Blake’s poetry will [...] provide an eternal poesy standard by which to measure sublimity and sincerity in contemporary masters such as Bob Dylan.’⁷⁰

On several occasions, though not during the recording sessions for the Blake album, Ginsberg was also able to persuade Dylan to accompany him on guitar while Ginsberg sang Blake’s songs. Ginsberg can also be seen singing Blake’s ‘Nurse’s Song’ in Dylan’s epic experimental film *Renaldo and Clara* (1978), where he plays a character billed simply as ‘The Father’. This is suggestive of his real-life role as something of a father figure not only to Dylan, but also to Sixties counterculture as a whole.⁷¹ It therefore seems appropriate that he should be featured in Dylan’s film singing Blake, whose work he was so instrumental in weaving into the fabric of the Sixties.

⁶⁸ *Dylan on Dylan*, p. 63.

⁶⁹ Schumacher, p. 559.

⁷⁰ Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose*, pp. 278-9.

⁷¹ As Wilentz suggests, Dylan was in effect casting him ‘as the patriarch of the entire hip cultural family’ (p. 76.)

Ginsberg also plays a similar role in an earlier Dylan film, *Don't Look Back* (1967), D. A. Pennebaker's documentary of Dylan's 1965 tour of England. Throughout the film's opening sequence, which is the famous video of 'Subterranean Homesick Blues', Ginsberg can be seen hovering in the background while Dylan stands in the alley behind the Savoy Hotel holding up placards bearing the keywords of the song. Ginsberg's visual appearance in the video, sporting his trademark Sixties full beard and leaning on a staff, references and reinforces his role as Sixties father figure. More specifically however, as Sean Wilentz has noted, Ginsberg's appearance in the 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' video makes him look 'like a Blakean Jewish prophet'.⁷²

The fact that Ginsberg features on this video is often commented on simply as a marker of the closeness of his friendship with Dylan, usually with the underlying assumption that his inclusion in the background of the shot – engaged in animated conversation with Dylan's tour manager Bob Neuwirth and occasionally throwing his arms in the air in prophetic style – is more or less accidental. However, the fact that Ginsberg also appears, in exactly the same position on the screen, in an alternate take of the video shot on the same day in a different location, suggests that his inclusion was in fact very deliberate.⁷³ Pennebaker later jokingly commented of Ginsberg's inclusion, 'Allen came to sanctify us, I think',⁷⁴ but this comment can also be taken more seriously. Ginsberg's role in the film seems to be to offer Beat blessings and transmit Blakean energy to Dylan and the emergent Sixties counterculture.⁷⁵ Given Ginsberg's passion for Blakean pilgrimages (discussed in Chapter Three), he must surely have known that the alley where 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' was filmed is adjacent to the site of Blake's final residence, 3 Fountain Court, where in 1827 he died 'Singing of the things he saw in Heaven'.⁷⁶

If Ginsberg's presence (and Blake's ghostly presence) in 'Subterranean Homesick Blues'/*Don't Look Back* 'sanctifies' Dylan, then Dylan also effectively beatifies Ginsberg (in both senses) in an interview conducted around the same time, not only praising him as 'the best' poet, but even describing him as 'saintly' and 'holy',

⁷² Wilentz, p. 157.

⁷³ "'Subterranean Homesick Blues' Alternate Take' (DVD extra), *Don't Look Back*. Dir. D.A. Pennebaker. 2007. DVD 82876832149.

⁷⁴ DVD commentary track, *Don't Look Back*.

⁷⁵ A photo of Ginsberg, wearing a top hat, also appears on the reverse of *Bringing It All Back Home*, below which is an image of Dylan, now wearing Ginsberg's hat, with obvious symbolism.

⁷⁶ See 'Blake & London' <<http://www.blakesociety.org/about-blake/blake-london/>> [accessed 12 March 2014].

qualities that Dylan defines as ‘crossing all the boundaries of time and usefulness’.⁷⁷ Dylan’s perhaps surprising use of the word ‘usefulness’ in this context is a reminder that, for all the genuine closeness of the friendship between Ginsberg and Dylan, the public connection between them also worked to their mutual advantage. Wilentz suggests that not only did having Ginsberg ‘as his visible ally’ help Dylan, but it also helped Ginsberg: ‘In one sense, Ginsberg was anointing Dylan; in another, he was making sure nobody forgot how Dylan was really an extension of himself, Kerouac, and the other Beats. Once a salesman, always a salesman.’⁷⁸

The filming of ‘Subterranean Homesick Blues’ took place around the same time that Ginsberg heard Dylan perform ‘Gates of Eden’, and ecstatically recognized its Blakean significance in the reawakening of Albion, as described earlier. However, his emotional reaction to hearing ‘Gates of Eden’ in 1965 can also be linked to his initial reaction when he heard ‘A Hard Rain’s A-Gonna Fall’, shortly before his very first meeting with Dylan in 1963. Recalling this first event, Ginsberg later insisted that he had wept tears of joy when he recognized that Dylan’s music represented the passing on of the Beat torch to a younger generation.⁷⁹ However, I want to suggest that Ginsberg’s emotional reaction to Dylan’s song may also have included a certain anxiety at what he recognized as an ending of the ‘Beat era’, or its transformation into something new. This interpretation is supported by the fact that when he had his first meeting with Dylan, just weeks after first hearing ‘A Hard Rain’, he turned down Dylan’s invitation to accompany him to his next concert, fearful that he ‘might become his slave or something, his mascot.’⁸⁰

At around the same time that Ginsberg was weeping at the discovery of Dylan’s music, Dylan was himself composing Beat-inspired poems, in one of which, as I will explore shortly, he provided a list of his own primary influences which included ‘Allen Ginsberg’ and ‘William Blake’. Yet when, very shortly after writing this 1963 poem, Dylan actually befriended Ginsberg and the other Beats who claimed Blake as their poetic lodestar, he immediately started making oddly contradictory statements

⁷⁷ *Dylan on Dylan*, p. 87.

⁷⁸ Wilentz, p.77. A similar point is made in Richard E. Hishmeh, ‘Marketing Genius: The Friendship of Allen Ginsberg and Bob Dylan’, *The Journal of American Culture*, 29 (2006), 395-405.

⁷⁹ Interview with Ginsberg in Martin Scorsese’s film *No Direction Home* (2005). As Sean Wilentz notes (p. 320n), the significance of this event is made doubly apparent in the film by the fact that Ginsberg in the interview begins to choke up once again as he remembers his initial reaction to Dylan’s music.

⁸⁰ Miles, pp. 333-4. Ginsberg’s concerns were in some ways prescient. According to poet Anne Waldman, during Dylan’s 1975 Rolling Thunder tour (in which both Ginsberg and Waldman participated), the favourite joke was that ‘Ginsberg was Dylan’s most dedicated groupie’ (quoted in Wilentz, p. 76).

concerning the importance of Blake to his own work. Indeed, according to Ginsberg, part of the initial impetus for his own project of setting Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* to music was that 'Dylan said that he didn't like Blake, so I thought this would be an interesting way of laying Blake on him.'⁸¹

Michael McClure, another Blakean Beat who eventually became close to Dylan, tells a similar story which once again illustrates the complex dynamic between Dylan and the Beats, with its mutual anxieties surrounding literary influence and its strong Blakean connection. McClure remembers his initial resistance to listening to Dylan's songs: 'I absolutely did not want to hear Dylan. I imagined, without admitting it to myself, that Dylan was a threat to poetry – or to my poetry. I sensed that a new mode of poetry, or rebirth of an old one, might replace my mode.'⁸² When in 1965 he was finally persuaded to listen to *Bringing It All Back Home*, his response was remarkably similar to Ginsberg's: 'The next thing I knew I was crying. It was "Gates of Eden".' Like Ginsberg, this song immediately made him think of Blake, inducing in McClure an experience strangely similar to Ginsberg's own 1948 Blake vision.⁸³ McClure recalls: 'I had the idea that I was hallucinating, that it was William Blake's voice coming out of the walls [...]. Then I went back to those people who had tried to get me to listen and I told them that I thought the revolution had begun.' However, when McClure met Dylan shortly afterwards and told him about the Blakean experience that Dylan's music had induced in him, Dylan responded by declaring that he himself 'had not read Blake and did not know the poetry', something that McClure understandably found 'hard to believe'.⁸⁴

One way to explain the clear contradictions between, on the one hand, the negative statements Dylan made about Blake to Ginsberg and McClure in the mid-1960s and, on the other hand, the interest in Blake which is apparent in his work in this period would be to refer to the famously contrary and quixotic public persona that Dylan began to adopt around this time in response to his growing fame. However, it is significant that Dylan's evasive and contradictory comments about Blake were made not to some out of touch and uptight interviewer, but privately to Beats who had now

⁸¹ Ginsberg, *Deliberate Prose*, p. 151.

⁸² Michael McClure, 'Bob Dylan: The Poet's Poet', *Rolling Stone*, 14 March 1974 <<http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/bob-dylan-the-poets-poet-19740314>> [accessed 28 February 2014]. All quotations are from the unpaginated online version of the article.

⁸³ As mentioned in Chapter Two, McClure had himself had a significant dream about Blake as a teenager, which he discussed with Ginsberg the first time they met in 1954.

⁸⁴ McClure, 'Bob Dylan'.

become his friends and to whom he also owed a longstanding debt of influence, as both he and they acknowledged. We can therefore see such comments as born out of the specific anxieties that formed part of the complex dynamic of literary exchange between Dylan and the Beats, in which, as Dylan sings in 'Gates of Eden', 'Relationships of ownership / They whisper in the wings'. Blake in the Sixties in some ways 'belonged' to Ginsberg and other Beats like McClure, and Dylan seemed reluctant to admit that he had 'borrowed' him.

'above the bells of William Blake'

I want to now turn to an analysis of the meaning and significance of Dylan's earliest Blake reference, in a work that Dylan was writing immediately before he met Ginsberg at the end of 1963, and which appears on his third album, *The Times They Are A-Changin'* (1964). Significantly however, this work is not a song, but a long poem entitled '11 Outlined Epitaphs', whose stanzas are spread across the reverse of the album cover and continue on an insert within the album.⁸⁵ Perhaps for the reason that it is not a song, it has been very little written about, either in relation to its Blake connections or otherwise. However, it is noteworthy not only for the fact that it contains Dylan's earliest reference to Blake, but also because, somewhat remarkably given the extent of Blake's influence on Dylan, this is the only mention of Blake's *name* in all of Dylan's published written output, by which I mean his lyrics, album liner notes, poems, the 'novel' *Tarantula* and the memoir *Chronicles*.

Influences and sources are a major theme within '11 Outlined Epitaphs'. Early on in the poem Dylan identifies himself as 'a thief of thoughts / not [...] a stealer of souls' who has 'built an' rebuilt / upon what is waitin''. Lines such as these are strongly suggestive of the tensions I have just identified surrounding Dylan's relationship to the Beats, and further evidence for such anxieties can be found in the memoir of Suze Rotolo, who writes: 'Accusations of plagiarism would always be a ball and chain on Dylan's career as a songwriter, but especially so in the early years'.⁸⁶ While in this early part of Dylan's career such accusations were mostly focused on his borrowing of other

⁸⁵ '11 Outlined Epitaphs' is not included in *Lyrics: 1962-2001*, but is printed in Dylan's *Writings and Drawings* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), pp. 100-110, and also in his *Lyrics: 1962-1985* (New York: Knopf, 1985), pp. 106-116. *Writings and Drawings* is also notable for the poetic dedication on its first page, which includes the following distinctly Wordsworthian lines: 'and to the great wondrous / melodious spirit / which covereth the oneness / of us all'.

⁸⁶ Rotolo, p. 135.

songwriters' tunes, as we will see towards the end of this chapter it is Dylan's textual borrowings that have recently provoked controversy.

Thus there is a clear sense in '11 Outlined Epitaphs' that this self-described 'thief of thoughts' is defending himself against accusations of musical or lyrical plagiarism, as Dylan argues that there is a common stock of material which singers and writers draw upon, traceable back to the natural elements of the world itself:

(influences?
hundreds thousands
perhaps millions
for all songs lead back t' the sea
an' at one time, there was
no singin' tongue t' imitate it)
t' make new sounds out of old sounds
an' new words out of old words
an' not t' worry about the new rules[.]

Dylan's argument here, that 'all songs lead back t' the sea' (despite 'the new rules' of copyright), is clearly a defensive response to the rhetorical question with which the stanza begins. But towards the end of the poem Dylan changes tack and begins to make a long and very specific list of his musical and literary influences. This list itself appears to be another defensive response, this time to Dylan's realization, voiced in the poem, that his friend Dave Van Ronk (one of the most important figures in the Greenwich Village folk scene when Dylan first arrived) 'still scorns me for not readin' books'. It seems to be this which prompts Dylan to launch into a self-conscious list of his musical and literary influences, beginning with the fifteenth-century French poet François Villon, and continuing through Bertolt Brecht and several others, before finally arriving at

love songs of Allen Ginsberg
an' jail songs of Ray Bremser
the narrow tunes of Modigliani
an' the singin' plains of Harry Jackson
the cries of Charles Aznavour
with melodies of Yevtushenko
through the quiet fire of Miles Davis
above the bells of William Blake
an' beat visions of Johnny Cash
an' the saintliness of Pete Seeger[.]

The company in which Blake is here placed is significant, encompassing not only Ginsberg but also a wide range of other participants in and influences on the counterculture of the Sixties. However, I also want to draw attention to a more pragmatic question: what are ‘the bells of William Blake’?

It is notable that Dylan makes other references to bells elsewhere in ‘11 Outlined Epitaphs’, as in the following section:

the underground’s gone deeper
says the old chimney sweeper
the underground’s outa work
sing the bells of New York
the underground’s more dangerous
ring the bells of Los Angeles
the underground’s gone
cry the bells of San Juan
but where has it gone to
ring the bells of Toronto[.]

This has as its ultimate source the traditional children’s rhyme ‘Oranges and Lemons’, but Dylan is probably drawing instead on the modern version entitled ‘The Bells of Rhymney’, which was then popular in the Greenwich Village folk scene and was later recorded by The Byrds.⁸⁷ Whatever Dylan’s immediate source, his poem, in the voice of the bells themselves, seems to be raising questions about the past and present status of a North American ‘underground’, which can be seen to encompass the nascent Sixties counterculture, the Beat culture of the Fifties, and perhaps also the left-wing American underground of the Thirties associated with Dylan’s hero and role model Woody Guthrie.

Dylan’s reference to ‘the bells of William Blake’ can also be linked forward to the imagery of the poem’s final lines, in which he describes how ‘outside, the chimes rung / an’ they / are still ringin’’. The language and symbolism of these final lines in turn reveal the poem’s clear thematic and textual links to the song ‘Chimes of Freedom’, released on Dylan’s next album, *Another Side of Bob Dylan* (1964).

⁸⁷ In this socially-conscious adaptation of ‘Oranges and Lemons’, the London church bells of the original nursery rhyme are exchanged for bells from various locations in Wales, whose chimes ask a series of questions relating to the poverty and industrial exploitation of the area. ‘The Bells of Rhymney’ is itself an excerpt from a longer work by the Welsh poet Idris Davies (1905-1954). See *Song & Dance Man III*, p. 643-4.

London's Chimes

'Chimes of Freedom' is the first Dylan song in which the influence of Blake can be detected, and it is no coincidence that the song also marks a more general change in Dylan's style ('another side' of Dylan, as the album title suggests), as he moves beyond his earlier reliance on the folk ballad and 'talking blues' styles, and begins instead to incorporate into his songs the dense, linguistically adventurous, Beat-influenced techniques that he was already using in non-lyric poetry such as '11 Outlined Epitaphs'. Dylan's adoption of a style of writing involving an unpunctuated flow of words and ideas can also be seen to have similarities with some of Blake's own work.⁸⁸

Indeed, although '11 Outlined Epitaphs' and 'Chimes of Freedom' appear on different albums (released just months apart in 1964), it would seem that they evolved out of the same source material. Dylan was writing one early version of the lyrics for what became 'Chimes of Freedom' around the same time that he wrote '11 Outlined Epitaphs', in mid to late 1963.⁸⁹ This early version of 'Chimes of Freedom' included the lines

the colors of friday were dull
as cathedral bells were gently burnin
strikin for the gentle
strikin for the kind
strikin for the crippled ones
an strikin for the blind.⁹⁰

In the final version this becomes

[...] the chimes of freedom flashing
Through the wild cathedral evening [...]
Tolling for the deaf an' blind, tolling for the mute
Tolling for the mistreated, mateless mother, the mistitled prostitute[.]

These lines of the final version, in combination with the song's reference to 'each an' ev'ry underdog soldier in the night', clearly link 'Chimes of Freedom' to Blake's poem 'London', which like Dylan's song is based around a sympathetic listing of

⁸⁸ On the striking similarities between Blake's *An Island in the Moon* and Dylan's surrealistic liner notes for *Highway 61 Revisited*, see Gray, *Song & Dance Man III*, p. 60.

⁸⁹ See Wilentz, p. 69.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Wilentz, p. 69.

downtrodden unfortunates, including the ‘hapless Soldier’ and the ‘youthful Harlot’.⁹¹ We can also see in the song’s list format a form of the ‘bardic cataloguing’ used by both Blake himself and Ginsberg.⁹² These elements of ‘Chimes of Freedom’, along with a number of other Blake links which I will examine shortly, strongly suggest that Dylan was reading Blake’s *Songs* between late 1963 and early 1964, the period during which he composed both ‘11 Outlined Epitaphs’ and ‘Chimes’ (a second early draft of which was written in February 1964).⁹³

I want to suggest that the structural and thematic links between ‘Chimes of Freedom’ and Blake’s ‘London’ include not only the list format and the references to downtrodden soldiers and prostitutes already noted above, but also Dylan’s references to ‘faces hidden’, ‘the guardians and protectors of the mind’, ‘the aching ones whose wounds cannot be nursed’, and ‘the countless confused, accused, misused, strung-out ones an’ worse’. Together, these lines are strongly suggestive of Blake’s reference in ‘London’ to the ‘Marks of weakness, marks of woe’ that he discovers on ‘every face’.

Equally significantly, Dylan’s song echoes Blake’s two-fold diagnosis of the causes of such suffering. In ‘London’, Blake emphasizes the underlying political and institutional causes of suffering through a series of striking synecdoches – the ‘charter’d street’, the ‘charter’d Thames’, the ‘blackening Church’, the bloody ‘Palace walls’ – but he also reveals the psychological mechanisms through which such suffering operates: ‘In every voice: in every ban, / The mind-forg’d manacles I hear’. Dylan reproduces his own version of these ‘mind-forg’d manacles’ in the lines quoted above; people are ‘confused’, ‘strung-out’, carrying ‘wounds [that] cannot be nursed’, in need of ‘guardians and protectors of the mind’.

Much has been written about Dylan’s determination to move away from ‘finger-pointing songs’ on *Another Side of Bob Dylan*, but while his style and focus changes,

⁹¹ Other scholars who link ‘Chimes of Freedom’ to Blake include Clark and Keery (p. 226), and Oliver Trager, *Keys to the Rain: The Definitive Bob Dylan Encyclopedia* (New York: Billboard Books, 2004), p. 104.

⁹² This phrase is used by Mike Marqusee to describe what he sees as the influence of Whitman and Ginsberg on ‘Chimes of Freedom’. However, I want to suggest that the strength of the song’s links to Blake’s ‘London’ suggest the more direct influence of Blake’s own ‘bardic cataloguing’. See Marqusee, *Wicked Messenger: Bob Dylan and the 1960s* (New York: Seven Stories, 2005), p. 100.

⁹³ Reproduced as a manuscript facsimile in Santelli, p. 35 (insert). Another poem Dylan composed around the same time, which is untitled but was used as the liner notes for *Joan Baez in Concert, Part 2* also refers to ‘cathedral bells’ and ‘chimes’, as well as the other key trope of ‘Chimes of Freedom’, the thunderstorm. Although the ‘Baez liner notes’ poem itself shows no overt Blakean influence, its strong textual and thematic links to the Blake-influenced ‘11 Outlined Epitaphs’ and ‘Chimes of Freedom’ mean that when Clark and Keery mistakenly cite ‘Baez liner notes’ as the source of Dylan’s reference to ‘the bells of William Blake’ (p. 226), it is an understandable and revealing mistake.

Dylan never abandons politics altogether.⁹⁴ In fact, it is the mix of the political and the psychological (along with the wariness of ideological rigidity) that makes not only ‘Chimes of Freedom’ but also many of the songs that follow it distinctively Blakean. A resonance with Blake’s ‘London’ can also for example be heard on ‘It’s Alright, Ma (I’m Only Bleeding)’, from Dylan’s next album, *Bringing It All Back Home* (1965). In this song, Dylan reveals a world in which the mind of the individual (and therefore also society at large) is controlled by ‘the masters [who] make the rules / For the wise men and the fools’; however, it is a form of domination that for the most part operates not overtly but via more subtle means such as the ‘Advertising signs [that] con / You into thinking you’re the one’, so that ‘You lose yourself’ only to ‘reappear’ in a different mental configuration. The Blakean aspect of this is pointed out by Mike Marqusee:

‘It’s Alright Ma’ is filled with a Gramscian conviction that the most insidious means of domination are those that secure the ‘spontaneous consent’ of the dominated. It’s a song about ‘the mind-forged manacles’ that Blake heard clanging as he walked the streets of London in 1792.⁹⁵

At the same time however, in the final lines of the song Dylan makes clear that for those who do attempt to mentally unlock their manacled minds, the means of domination employed by the political ‘masters’ necessarily becomes more overt:

And if my thought-dreams could be seen
They’d probably put my head in a guillotine
But it’s alright, Ma, it’s life, and life only.

Even the reference to a ‘guillotine’ here is resonant with the politics of the French Revolution in Blake’s own time. We should remember that Blake’s own mental rebellion had put him in real physical danger, as demonstrated by his 1804 trial for sedition.⁹⁶ Once again, as with ‘Chimes of Freedom’, ‘It’s Alright, Ma’ follows the

⁹⁴ ‘There aren’t any finger-pointing songs in here,’ Dylan proudly declared in a 1964 interview with *The New Yorker*, reprinted in *Dylan on Dylan*, pp. 13-28 (p.15).

⁹⁵ Marqusee, p. 129. The link between Blake’s ‘mind-forg’d manacles’ and Gramsci’s concept of ‘hegemony’ is explored in detail in David Gross, “‘Mind-forg’d manacles’: Hegemony and Counter-hegemony in Blake”, *The Eighteenth Century*, 27 (1986), 3-25. Blake’s ‘mind-forg’d manacles’ might also productively be linked to Herbert Marcuse’s concept of ‘repressive tolerance’, much discussed in the Sixties. There is no evidence that either Gramsci or Marcuse read Blake (perhaps due to their non-English-speaking backgrounds), but it is easy to see why Blake would be attractive to those in the Sixties New Left who were reading Gramsci and Marcuse.

⁹⁶ See Bentley, *Stranger from Paradise*, pp. 251-266. According to Bentley, the maximum penalty for sedition was imprisonment, but as he points out these were nonetheless very dangerous charges in the midst of war-fever and the fear of French invasion. Had Blake been charged with treason, as others were around this time for expressing similar sentiments (Blake was alleged to have ‘damned the King of England’), he could have been drawn and quartered.

pattern set in Blake's 'London' of mixing the psychological with the political, and indeed politicizing consciousness itself.

'Let freedom ring'

Although the Blakean psychological politics of 'Chimes of Freedom' differentiates it from what Dylan himself described as the 'finger-pointing' politics of his earlier protest songs, I want to suggest that the song's 'chime' and 'bell' imagery, which it shares with '11 Outlined Epitaphs', does in fact suggest a specific textual link to the largest and most significant political protest of the early Sixties, the 'March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom' held on 28 August 1963. The speech given on that day by Martin Luther King, which Dylan heard at first hand as a performer at the event, was characterized rhetorically not only by its famous repetition of the words 'I have a dream', but also by the repeated phrase 'Let freedom ring'.⁹⁷

Echoes of King's phrase can be heard not only in 'Chimes of Freedom', but significantly also in the final lines of '11 Outlined Epitaphs': 'outside, the chimes rung / an' they / are still ringin''. The poem's line 'above the bells of William Blake' is of course also part of this same trope. As I have shown above, these two works by Dylan (or early drafts thereof), were all written in the latter part of 1963, and therefore immediately following Dylan's performance at the March on Washington. In pursuing this investigation of the meaning and origin of 'the bells of William Blake', I want to therefore ask if there was some aspect of King's speech, or of the March on Washington protest more generally, that Dylan may have associated with Blake.

One link between Blake and the civil-rights struggle of the early 1960s with which Dylan was involved is suggested by the strong associations between Blake and the nineteenth-century abolitionist movement. A number of Blake's works can be seen to engage with both the topic of the Atlantic slave trade itself and also with broader issues of racial equality. One of the most significant of these is 'The Little Black Boy' from *Songs of Innocence*. However, as Marcus Wood notes, 'the critique of slavery that Blake generated is one that does not fall into any easy polemical category.'⁹⁸ As is clear from the first lines of 'The Little Black Boy', Blake's engagements with the topic are

⁹⁷ Martin Luther King, 'I have a dream...' (speech given at the March on Washington, 28 August 1963), <http://www.archives.gov/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf> [accessed 4 December 2013].

⁹⁸ See Marcus Wood, *Slavery, Empathy, and Pornography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 181.

unsettling in part because he is interested above all in dramatizing the complex psychological effects of slavery:

My mother bore me in the southern wild,
And I am black, but O! my soul is white;
White as an angel is the English child:
But I am black as if bereav'd of light.

As in 'London', in this poem Blake seems to be emphasizing the 'mind forg'd manacles' rather than the physical ones more commonly associated with slavery. Other treatments of this topic can be discovered in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, *America a Prophecy*, and book nine of *Vala or the Four Zoas*, all of them in different ways ambiguous and unsettling rather than polemical.⁹⁹ The most problematic of all Blake's engagements with this topic are the engravings he produced for the slave-owning Captain John Stedman's *Narrative of a Five Years Expedition Against the Revolted Negroes of Surinam*.¹⁰⁰ I would suggest however that the ambiguous and non-polemical character of Blake's treatment of race and slavery are if anything likely to make Blake more attractive to Dylan. Both Blake and Dylan share a dislike of overt political ideologies while at the same time being fundamentally political writers. More broadly, as I suggested in Chapter One, while Blake was attractive to some of the more ideologically-driven figures in the Sixties, his lack of an explicit political ideology also resonated with many in the New Left.

Yet in some ways the most interesting and influential way in which Blake's works can be seen to engage with slavery and abolitionism is posthumously, through his nineteenth-century American publication history. As discussed in Chapter One, the first substantial printing of William Blake in North America occurred in 1842 when a large selection of his poems, beginning with 'The Little Black Boy', were printed in a series of issues of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, an abolition journal whose mass circulation in the 1840s effectively gave it the status of a national liberal newspaper. As Marcus Wood points out, 'Blake consequently first appeared before a popular American readership as an anti-slavery propagandist.'¹⁰¹ Despite the ambiguity of Blake's treatment of race, we can therefore find a number of reasons why the 'ringing' rhetoric and imagery of Martin Luther King's 1963 speech might become connected in Dylan's

⁹⁹ Wood, pp. 181-199.

¹⁰⁰ On the remarkable friendship between Blake and Stedman, see Bentley, *Stranger from Paradise*, pp. 113-117. Stedman's *Narrative* is also the subject of a chapter in Wood, pp. 87-140.

¹⁰¹ Wood, p. 182.

mind with Blake, and give rise to the line ‘above the bells of William Blake’, composed very shortly after the speech.

‘Your sons and your daughters / Are beyond your command’

My investigation of Dylan’s earliest Blake reference, the line ‘above the bells of William Blake’, has focused thus far on the strength of the link between ‘11 Outlined Epitaphs’ and the more overtly Blake-influenced ‘Chimes of Freedom’. However, it is still not clear why in ‘11 Outlined Epitaphs’ Dylan should associate the image of bells or chimes themselves so strongly with Blake.

Clark and Keery, in their own very brief discussion of Dylan’s ‘bells of William Blake’ (in which they mistakenly cite the line as coming from a different Dylan poem altogether), note Blake’s references to ‘bells’ in *Jerusalem* (E245) and in ‘The Ecchoing Green’, but conclude that ‘the image seems hardly distinctive of Blake’.¹⁰²

I want to suggest that while bells may not be distinctively Blakean, it is worth briefly examining the ‘The Ecchoing Green’, as the individual Blake poem in which bells feature most strongly. The text of this poem, along with the images that accompany it across two plates of *Songs of Innocence*, reveals an idyllic scene of children and young people frolicking in spring sunshine. This scene is accompanied, in the opening stanza, by the ringing of bells:

The Sun does arise,
And make happy the skies.
The merry bells ring
To welcome the Spring.
The sky-lark and thrush,
The birds of the bush,
Sing louder around,
To the bells chearful sound.
While our sports shall be seen
On the Ecchoing Green.

As Heather Glen argues, this apparently simple poem can be read not only as a celebration of ‘play’ (in both children and adults), but also as a defence of it, and more specifically a protest against the multiple (and interlinked) threats to play and playfulness in the late eighteenth-century. These threats were religious, political and industrial in nature, and were manifested in the warnings against ‘idleness’ that were a

¹⁰² Clark and Keery, p. 226.

staple of the children's hymns whose forms and motifs Blake appropriated and ironized in his *Songs*.¹⁰³ As Glen further notes, through the series of 'apparently unconditional statements' with which the poem begins, Blake depicts 'not nostalgic or utopian fantasy, but living possibility', so that the poem becomes an 'articulation of the "Eternal Now" that is apprehended in "play"'.¹⁰⁴ Further, Blake's poem actually works to create the playful freedom it articulates; in the lines quoted above, 'shall be' can be read as not merely descriptive, but as taking on 'the force of a performative utterance'.¹⁰⁵ Particularly in the light of Glen's persuasive reading, it is not hard to see how the poem would be attractive to Dylan and to the emerging Sixties youth generation, who understood the value of 'play' and the 'Eternal Now'. However, while it is therefore possible to construct a more general link between this poem and the worldview of Sixties counterculture, the same could be said of many other Blake poems, and it seems highly unlikely that Dylan's '11 Outlined Epitaphs' is making any specific reference to the 'merry bells' of 'The Ecchoing Green'.

'In what furnace'?

I want to make one final suggestion concerning Dylan's 'bells of William Blake', which relates to Dylan's interest in the minutiae of nineteenth-century American history, as discovered in the microfilm room of the New York Public Library. While conducting my own archival research into Blake's presence in nineteenth-century American newspapers, I was intrigued to discover that one of the most prominent foundries in nineteenth-century America was named 'William Blake and Company', with this name appearing on every church bell they produced.¹⁰⁶ The metalworks was not of course named after the English poet, but after an American namesake, the owner of the foundry, based in Boston, Massachusetts. Although now a completely obscure figure, it seems quite possible that this American William Blake was better-known in nineteenth-century America than the then obscure English poet. The American William Blake was also well-connected; he had personal and professional links to the family of Paul Revere, the famous patriot of the American Revolution, whose 'midnight ride' was

¹⁰³ Glen, pp. 134-141.

¹⁰⁴ Glen, pp. 134, 140. 'Eternal Now' is Blake's own phrase, from his 'Annotations to Lavater' (E592).

¹⁰⁵ Glen, p. 138.

¹⁰⁶ Although I cite some of these newspapers shortly, I have discovered that the most detailed source of general information on the subject is the 'Tower Bells' website, a site hosting research on historic American church bells and their associated foundries. For the section dedicated to the Blake foundry, see <<http://www.towerbells.org/data/IXfoundryHooperBlake.html>> [accessed 30 June 2014].

celebrated in Longfellow's 1861 poem and is satirically referred to in Dylan's 'Tombstone Blues' (*Highway 61 Revisited*): 'The city fathers they're trying to endorse / The reincarnation of Paul Revere's horse / But the town has no need to be nervous'.

Revere himself was a metal worker and foundry owner by trade,¹⁰⁷ as were his descendants, and it seems that the Boston foundry that bore William Blake's name between 1869 and 1898 was actually the same foundry originally set up by Paul Revere in 1792; the American William Blake is listed as one of the managers of this foundry, in partnership with Revere's grandson, as early as 1823. It is also noteworthy that apart from church bells, the most significant products cast in the foundry were weapons; the foundry supplied an important class of cannon known as the 'Napoleon' to the North during the Civil War. It is tempting to imagine the consequences if William Blake the poet had found out about this foundry run by his American namesake and contemporary. The foundry's output of church bells and cannons, and its association with the industrialist and American hero Revere, makes it an early example of what in the Sixties would have been called the 'military-industrial-religious complex'; William Blake the antinomian poet would surely have identified it as one of America's 'dark Satanic Mills'.¹⁰⁸

It therefore seems possible that Dylan may have read about the bells of this other William Blake in the early 1960s in the course of his research into nineteenth-century American history, which as we have seen included not only reading history books but also conducting archival research. During my own (online) search of American newspaper archives, several of the references I discovered to William Blake the foundry owner were from the 1855 to 1865 period that Dylan tells us he focused on, although none of my references are from those newspapers that Dylan names as his favourite sources.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ See Robert Martello, *Midnight Ride, Industrial Dawn: Paul Revere and the Growth of American Enterprise* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010). Unfortunately Martello's book ends with Revere's death in 1818, so does not mention William Blake's role in the continued operation of the Boston foundry with Revere's descendants.

¹⁰⁸ It is also possible that this foundry-owning American Blake is an influence on Jim Jarmusch's Blake-influenced 'psychedelic western' *Dead Man* (1995), in which an American William Blake arrives in the hellish town of 'Machine' to take up a job in the metal works.

¹⁰⁹ See for example the small notices placed by William Blake in *The Constitution* (Washington, DC), 7 May 1859, p. 1 and *Boston Daily Advertiser*, 29 March 1862, p. 4. Interestingly, both mention a patent he had taken out for a new type of furnace. Like Blake the poet, it would seem that Blake the foundry owner was an innovator; both worked with metal, although of course Blake the poet never thought to patent his new engraving technique.

Of course, if Dylan did have this American Blake in mind when he wrote of ‘the bells of William Blake’ in ‘11 Outlined Epitaphs’, he would certainly also have intended to reference the English poet, and the connection with the foundry-owner would have been little more than a private pun.

I have found no direct evidence that Dylan knew of William Blake the bell-maker, but there are several other interesting points we can make in connection with this theory. Firstly, it is clear from another passage in *Chronicles* that Dylan does have a keen interest in real church bells of the kind cast by ‘William Blake and Company’ and other foundries, and not only in the more symbolic bells that feature in his ‘Chimes of Freedom’ and in Martin Luther King’s speech. Still describing his experiences in early 1960s New York, Dylan writes:

Across the street from where I stood looking out the window was a church with a bell tower. The ringing of bells made me feel at home, too. I’d always heard and listened to the bells. Iron, brass, silver bells – the bells sang. [...] I even liked doorbells and the NBC chimes on the radio.¹¹⁰

Thinking of Dylan’s ‘bells of William Blake’ and ‘chimes of freedom’ as real physical objects cast in foundries also brings to mind several connections between Dylan and metalworking. These connections range from his childhood spent in the Minnesota Iron Range towns of Duluth and Hibbing,¹¹¹ to the intriguing news that in recent years Dylan has himself been constructing large sculpture-like gates from welded scrap metal; he organized the first public exhibition of his own metalwork in 2013.¹¹²

An association between bells, their chimes, and the foundries in which they are produced is also present in the second stanza of ‘Chimes of Freedom’, where Dylan sings of watching from ‘the city’s melted furnace [...] / As the echo of the wedding bells before the blowin’ rain / Dissolved into the bells of the lightning’; this furnace image can itself be linked to ‘the mind forg’d manacles’ of ‘London’, the Blake poem on which ‘Chimes of Freedom’ seems to be based. If Dylan was at the time reading

¹¹⁰ *Chronicles*, pp. 31-32.

¹¹¹ In ‘My Life in A Stolen Moment’, a poem first printed on a 1963 concert programme, Dylan writes: ‘Duluth’s an iron ore shipping town in Minnesota [...] Hibbing’s got the biggest open pit ore mine in the world’ (Santelli, p. 26).

¹¹² Duncan Bartlett, ‘Bob Dylan unveils first metal-work sculpture exhibition’, *BBC News website*, 17 November 2013 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-24955933>> [accessed 16 December 2013]. In the article, Dylan is quoted as saying, ‘Gates appeal to me because of the negative space they allow. They can shut you in or shut you out.’ According to the gallery owner, Dylan is ‘drawing from an industrial past’, based on his Iron Range childhood. As the article notes, a link can also be made to Dylan’s ‘Gates of Eden’.

‘London’ alongside the rest of Blake’s *Songs*, he may also have noted the ‘furnace’ in which Blake imagines ‘The Tyger’ being created:

What the hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp!¹¹³

If in 1963 Dylan had already read beyond Blake’s lyric works and into his prophetic books, he might also have noted that Los (who as the embodiment of creativity is often linked to Blake himself) is a blacksmith.

While my final line of enquiry into Dylan’s reference to ‘the bells of William Blake’ has raised the seemingly absurd question of whether the line necessarily refers to the English poet at all, I want to conclude this argument by suggesting that whether or not the line also involves a private pun on the American foundry-owning Blake, Dylan almost certainly does not have a specific Blake poem in mind here. Rather, the phrase ‘above the bells of William Blake’, like Ginsberg’s reference in ‘Howl’ to ‘Blake-light tragedy’, perhaps seeks to evoke the synaesthetic effect of Blake on the senses, while evading definitive interpretation. At the same time, the phrase seems representative of Blake’s general effect on the era, suggestive of the way in which Blake’s words echo out across the Sixties.

‘repeat quotations / Draw conclusions’

It seems appropriate to conclude this survey of the links between Dylan and Blake with one of Dylan’s most recent songs. While ‘Roll on John’ (*Tempest*, 2012) has not yet had time to become part of the established ‘canon’ of Blakean Dylan songs, it must now take its place at the heart of this canon, alongside ‘Gates of Eden’ and ‘Every Grain of Sand’, since it contains the longest and most overt Blake reference of any Dylan song. Furthermore, while the song’s date of composition makes it chronologically far removed from the Sixties (nearly fifty years stand between this song and Dylan’s first reference to Blake in ‘11 Outlined Epitaphs’), ‘Roll on John’ is nonetheless also an appropriate text with which to conclude my larger investigation into ‘William Blake in the 1960s’. The highly allusive song is primarily a tribute to another Sixties icon, John Lennon, and features quotations from several Beatles songs (particularly ‘A Day in the

¹¹³ As we will see, Dylan later quotes from ‘The Tyger’ in ‘Roll on John’ (2012).

Life'), alongside references to Liverpool, Hamburg, The Quarrymen (Lennon's first band), and Lennon's death. However, the song can also be interpreted as Dylan finally accepting his own status as countercultural icon and survivor of the Sixties; the song's elegiac tone encompasses more than just the figure of Lennon himself, and its unusually direct use of Blake's poetry seems to signify a new openness in Dylan's longstanding relationship with Blake as a literary icon of the period. At the same time however, as we shall see, there are still a number of other tensions to be discovered within the song which involve questions of literary influence and problematic 'relationships of ownership'.

The song's Blakean element is first hinted at in the song's chorus, which contains the line 'You burned so bright'; the source is then made fully explicit in the final verse:

Tyger, tyger burning bright
I pray the Lord my soul to keep
In the forests of the night
Cover 'em over and let him sleep.

Here, the famous opening lines of Blake's 'The Tyger' are interspersed with lines adapted from a well-known traditional children's prayer, 'Now I lay me down to sleep', which was included in the most widely-used American school textbook of the eighteenth century, *The New England Primer*. This distinctive intertextual approach to Blake that Dylan adopts in 'Roll on John' would therefore seem to suggest that he is aware of the way in which Blake's *Songs* are influenced by (and in critical conversation with) eighteenth-century children's prayers and hymns. Certainly, Dylan's new composite version of 'The Tyger' continues Blake's deliberately unsettling dual vision of God as both 'Tyger' and 'Lamb'. This effect is added to by Dylan's ambiguous use of pronouns in the verse above, which further serves to suggest a conflation of the semi-mythical Sixties figures of Lennon and Dylan themselves.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ In a review of 'Roll on John', Scott Beauchamp and Alex Shephard argue, with good reason, that Dylan treats Lennon as 'another mythic character to populate his songs' ('Bob Dylan and John Lennon's Weird, One-Sided Relationship', *The Atlantic*, 24 September 2012 <<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/09/bob-dylan-and-john-lennons-weird-one-sided-relationship/262680>> [accessed 3 March 2014]). However, the song also seems to be about the mythic Dylan and indeed the mythic Blake, and their place in the Sixties. While the relationship of influence between Dylan and Lennon may indeed have been 'one-sided', the authors of the article push their point too far when they conclude that "'Roll On John" isn't a sad song about a friend that died.' In the notes that accompany the *Biograph* compilation album (1985), Dylan says that the power of Jimi Hendrix's version of 'All Along the Watchtower' is such that his own song now feels to him like a tribute

As mentioned previously, Dylan's adaptation in this song of a traditional children's rhyme is by no means a unique occurrence in Dylan's oeuvre. In fact, as Michael Gray has shown, nursery rhymes and fairy tales form the basis for a surprising number of songs throughout Dylan's career.¹¹⁵ As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter, Dylan's references to and adaptations of traditional children's songs can be linked not only to their 'original' sources, but also to Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, which adapts, appropriates and critiques the didactic children's songs and hymns of his own time.¹¹⁶ By quoting lines from Blake's 'The Tyger' and intercutting them with lines from an eighteenth-century children's prayer, Dylan highlights (apparently deliberately) the historical links between the two.

Although Ginsberg's various encounters with the Beatles provide a few very minor links between Lennon and Blake, there is no particularly obvious biographical or literary reason for Dylan to pair Blake and Lennon as he does so deliberately in 'Roll on John'; perhaps surprisingly for a former art college student, Lennon does not seem to use Blake at all in his own work.¹¹⁷ Blake's strong presence within Dylan's tribute to Lennon can therefore be read as an invocation of Blake's own status as a presiding spirit of the Sixties more generally.

Yet if Dylan now seems comfortable making more overt use of Blake in his work, there are still problematic aspects to Dylan's relationship with his sources in 'Roll on John'. While Dylan 'late period' albums – from *Time Out of Mind* (1997) onwards – have received widespread critical acclaim, the '[a]ccusations of plagiarism' that Suze Rotolo highlighted as a feature of Dylan's 'early years' have also resurfaced in a new form in relation to the content of these late albums (and even his memoir *Chronicles*). With the help of internet search engines, it has become possible to prove that many of Dylan's recent songs are constructed as jigsaws of unacknowledged (some would say

to Hendrix, and concludes: 'I really miss him a lot, him and Lennon.' 'Roll on John' is surely his tribute to the real Lennon, as well as the mythical one.

¹¹⁵ See Michael Gray's fascinating chapter, 'Nursery Rhyme, Fairy Tale and "Under the Red Sky"', in *Song & Dance Man III*, pp. 635-702.

¹¹⁶ Despite Gray's often perceptive references to Blake elsewhere in his work, his chapter on Dylan's use of children's songs makes only the briefest mention of the Blakean influence on this aspect of Dylan's work. See *Song & Dance Man III*, p. 665.

¹¹⁷ Ginsberg first met the Beatles in Dylan's London hotel room in 1965, where they spent what Ginsberg described as 'a drunken night talking about pot and William Blake' (*The Letters of Allen Ginsberg* [Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2008], p. 307). According to Barry Miles however, the Blake conversation consisted of Ginsberg falling into Lennon's lap and asking his opinion of Blake, while Lennon pretended total ignorance, either in an attempt to escape Ginsberg's drunken advances or because of the general atmosphere of tension between Dylan and the Beatles (Miles, p. 370). In 1971, Lennon and Ringo Starr joined Ginsberg in singing Blake's 'Nurse's Song' at Lennon's birthday party (Schumacher, pp. 556-7). In 1976 Ginsberg gave Lennon cassettes of his Blake recordings (*Letters*, p. 385.)

hidden) lines and phrases taken from a wide variety of other sources.¹¹⁸ Even the title of the album *'Love and Theft'* (2001) is a quotation, apparently taken from the historian Eric Lott's 1993 study, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*.¹¹⁹ Yet while Dylan carefully places quotation marks around this album title, and the listener is meant to notice the well-known lines from Blake and the Beatles in 'Roll on John', most of his recent borrowings have been invisible to the naked ear or eye, drawing on obscure and sometimes bizarre sources including a translated Japanese gangster memoir.¹²⁰ Thus David Yaffe refers to the 'committee of muses' hovering behind Dylan's recent works, and notes that '[s]ometimes he alludes, but other times he plunders and buries.'¹²¹

In some respects, as I have shown in this chapter, Dylan has always relied on such borrowings, whether from Blake, from nineteenth-century newspapers, or from other musicians. 'Roll on John' in fact contains examples of the type of specifically musical borrowings that more often led to accusations of plagiarism in the early years of Dylan's career, as well as examples of the kind of literary borrowings (both acknowledged and unacknowledged) that Yaffe refers to above. It is notable for example that the musical sources of 'Roll on John' are not limited to Beatles lyrics; Dylan borrowed the title from an old blues song, 'Roll On, John', that he had himself performed on the radio show 'Folksinger's Choice' in 1962,¹²² and there is additionally a link to 'Long Gone Lost John', another old blues song whose first line Dylan had already borrowed once in 'Nettie Moore' (*Modern Times*, 2006). It is also surely significant that John Lennon himself was amongst those who earlier recorded 'Long Gone Lost John', as did Yoko Ono as a tribute to Lennon after his death.¹²³

As well as the very obvious literary allusions in 'Roll on John' to Blake's 'The Tyger' and to the traditional prayer 'Now I lay me down to sleep', the song is also typical of Dylan's later work in its reliance on a much more obscure 'buried' literary

¹¹⁸ These issues are well summarized in Wilentz, pp. 302-319, and in Jacobi, pp. 76-8.

¹¹⁹ Officially, 'Mr. Dylan neither confirms nor denies a connection between the title of his album and the title of that book.' But there is wide critical consensus that this is the case, and Lott's book relates to a period of American history in which, as we saw earlier in this chapter, Dylan has a strong interest (which also expresses itself on the songs of the album). See Eric Lott, "'Love and Theft' (2001)", in *The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan*, pp. 167-173.

¹²⁰ See Wilentz, pp. 308-9.

¹²¹ David Yaffe, 'Bob Dylan and the Anglo-American Tradition', in *The Cambridge Companion to Bob Dylan*, pp. 15-27 (p. 21).

¹²² Bob Dylan. *Folksinger's Choice: Live Radio Performance, March 11th, 1962, with Cynthia Gooding*. 2010. CD B003SM1Z24.

¹²³ Wilentz, p. 315.

source. Scott Warmuth, who in recent years has unearthed a wealth of fragmented literary sources on Dylan's 'late' albums, has shown that 'Roll on John' contains multiple lines and phrases all taken from the same short section of Robert Fagles's 1996 translation of Homer's *The Odyssey*, as do several other songs on *Tempest*.¹²⁴ Stripped of their original context, these lines are no longer recognizable as the work of Homer, or even his modern translator. Thus this late work of Dylan's emerges as a patchwork of Blake, the Beatles, Homer, together of course with lines of Dylan's own invention.

While comparisons have been made between Dylan's patchwork technique and that of modernists such as T. S. Eliot,¹²⁵ the key difference is that many of Dylan's allusions are 'buried', and untraceable without the help of internet search engines. Although Dylan is certainly familiar with the work of Eliot,¹²⁶ a better comparison for Dylan's recycling of an eclectic variety of literary material might be the 'cut-up' composition technique employed by William Burroughs, and indeed Dylan refers admiringly to Burroughs and his cut-up method in a number of interviews.¹²⁷ Dylan's method is also a reminder once again that the textual contexts of the Sixties counterculture are complex and sometimes unexpected; the presence of Blake in the work of Dylan and others is just one aspect of this literary counterculture where, as Dylan sings in 'Love Minus Zero/No Limit', people 'Read books, repeat quotations / Draw conclusions on the wall'.

Nonetheless, while 'Roll on John' seems to reveal a newly open quality in Dylan's relationship to Blake, we might question whether his direct quotation of what are probably Blake's most famous lines represents anything more than a decontextualized 'plundering' of Blake, especially if we remember Dylan's revealing 1968 comment that 'Blake did come up with some bold lines' but that 'the connection sometimes does not connect'.¹²⁸ Indeed, to return to a theme discussed in Chapter One, we might link this to the way in which Blake's most visible presence within Sixties counterculture as a whole was via the widespread repetition and literal 'Draw[ing] on the wall' of a relatively small number of his aphorisms, mostly taken from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, such as 'The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of

¹²⁴ Scott Warmuth, 'A Tempest Commonplace' <<http://www.pinterest.com/scottwarmuth/a-tempest-commonplace>> [accessed 4 March 2014].

¹²⁵ See eg Wilentz, pp. 312-3.

¹²⁶ In 'Desolation Row' (1965) Dylan depicts 'Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot / Fighting in the captain's tower', while in *Chronicles* he tells us 'I liked T. S. Eliot. He was worth reading' (p. 110).

¹²⁷ See for example *Dylan on Dylan*, pp. 45, 49, 87.

¹²⁸ *Dylan on Dylan*, p. 119.

instruction' and 'If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite.' How much of Blake's meaning remains in the famous opening lines of 'The Tyger' when Dylan appropriates them in 'Roll on John'?

Firstly, as I have suggested, Dylan's pairing of the lines from 'The Tyger' with an example of eighteenth-century children's verse suggests some contextual knowledge of the historical background and literary technique of Blake's *Songs*. Secondly, we can see 'Roll on John' as a song that actually takes as one of its themes the Sixties themselves, evoked in part through the song's aphoristic use of Blake. Finally however, I also want to return here to several linked arguments first set out in Chapter One of this study, informed in part by Mike Goode's 1996 article 'Blakespotting', which might help us to better appreciate the value and meaning of Blake's Sixties reception. Taking the historicist approach to Blakean reception studies advocated by Goode involves recognizing that the fundamental meaning of Blake is affected or even created by his radical Sixties reception, without losing sight of the importance of the historical and political circumstances of his texts' original production, the latent potential of which is revealed in his later reception. Furthermore, Blake's characteristic use of proverbs, aphorisms, and what Dylan identified as his 'bold lines', is the driving force behind the dissemination and appropriation of Blake's work. This has ensured that his work is not only read, but also reused, reactivated, and even once again set to music in the work of Dylan and others.

Conclusion

In 2000, at the time of the major Blake exhibition at the Tate Gallery, advertising posters appeared in London bearing the slogan, 'It's a fact. Many artists today are working whilst under the influence of Blake.'¹ In concluding this study, I want to suggest that not only were the Sixties clearly 'under the influence of Blake', but so too is Blake now 'working whilst under the influence of' the Sixties. Our understanding of Blake's writing and art is informed by all the various strands of popular, countercultural and academic approaches to Blake that emerged in the Sixties, but so too is our concept of Blake himself, who has emerged as a modern culture hero, both radical and popular. His work continues to influence not only artists, but also a wide variety of writers and filmmakers, from Philip Pullman to Jim Jarmusch. Blake, the inventor of a radical 'composite art', is also now seen as the father of the graphic novel; Blake's Sixties reception is explicitly referred to in the form and content of recent works in this genre by Alan Moore.²

At the same time Blake's mythological system is his own highly distinctive creation. Blake felt, as he wrote in *Jerusalem*, that he 'must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans' (J 10:20, E153).³ As I have shown, it is a system that exerted a considerable influence on the poetry of Allen Ginsberg, who I have suggested is the primary Blakean figure of a period that he helped create in his own and in Blake's image. However, rather than being 'enslav'd' by it, Ginsberg and others in this period, from Laing to Huxley to Dylan, offer their own unique readings of Blake, which deserve to be taken seriously.

I want to finish by briefly suggesting a few areas that could be developed further in future scholarship, by myself or others. As I wrote this study, Ginsberg came to dominate it to an extent that I had not initially anticipated, but I feel that there is nonetheless still more to say about Ginsberg and Blake, not least with reference to the huge online archive of his Naropa lectures, which offer fascinating insights into his understanding of Blake (and other writers), as well as into Blake's Sixties presence.

¹ Quoted in Shirley Dent and Jason Whittaker, *Radical Blake: Influence and Afterlife from 1827* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 5.

² I am thinking here particularly of Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, Jarmusch's *Dead Man*, and Moore's *Promethea*.

³ These words are spoken by the character Los. However, it would seem perverse to argue that Blake does not have his own system in mind here, especially since Los represents the spirit of the creative imagination and can therefore often be seen to represent Blake's alter-ego.

There is also clearly much more to be said about Blake and Sixties music. Some work has now been done not only on Blake and Dylan but also on Blake and Jim Morrison, but much more could be said about his influence on other musicians of the period, from Van Morrison to Patti Smith.

One figure whose links to Blake I had originally intended to examine in more detail is R. D. Laing. Very little has been written about him from a Blakean perspective, but it seems significant that while other scholars have used the work of Freud, Jung and Lacan to interpret Blake, Laing is a rare example of a psychologist who made direct use of Blake in his own work.

As I have also suggested in this study, there is still more work to be done on aspects of Blake's pre-Sixties reception, especially his nineteenth-century American reception, which we are now beginning to discover was more extensive than previously assumed. The radical nature of these Transcendentalist and abolitionist reception scenes can further be linked to various aspects of Blake's Sixties reception.

Finally, I want to suggest that the investigation of the links between Romanticism and the Sixties needs to be broadened beyond Blake. As I attempted to show in Chapter Three, there are fascinating tensions to be found within Wordsworth's Sixties reception. Clearly however, the Sixties countercultural influence of Coleridge, Shelley, Byron and Keats could also be investigated further.

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